



OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

NO. 82

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The MAGIC DISGUISE DETECTIVE



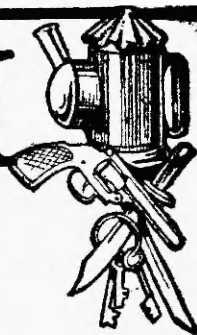
"THAT WOMAN
OWES ME FIVE DOLLARS, YOU
PROMISED HER YOU WOULD PAY IT."

The
ARTHUR WESTBROOK
Company
CLEVELAND
U. S. A.

by
**"OLD
SLEUTH**



OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY



A Series of
**THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES
EVER PUBLISHED**

No. 82.

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A.

Vol. II.

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The Magic Disguise Detective.

AN OLD-TIME DETECTIVE ROMANCE.

By "OLD SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

"You're smart."

"I guess so."

The first speaker was one of two powerful-looking men; the second was a light-built, velvety-looking young man, with handsome blue eyes, clean-cut features, and a singularly fair complexion.

The scene occurred upon the race-track. The fine-looking young man had forced himself upon the two rougher-looking men, and had attempted to give them a tip on the winning horse. He had received simply a very supercilious glance, and the two men walked away, paying no attention to him. The man who had volunteered the tip followed them up, however, and had a second, a third time ventured his advice, when the larger and the stronger of the two men addressed the words with which we open our narrative.

"Young fellow, you're too fresh; we don't want your advice."

"I guess so."

"You're impertinent."

"I guess so."

"Take that!"

The larger man made a quick movement to slap the nice-looking young fellow's face, when a most startling and astonishing result followed. The man who attempted the face-slapping received a blow that sent him reeling to the ground, and the next instant his friend rolled down after him. Both men were on their feet in an instant. They saw the young man who had downed them dart behind a betting booth. They started after him, but were met by an old man studying a bunch of tickets on the races.

"Halloo! did you see a young fellow run around here?"

"No."

The two men looked around and made a singular discovery: the space behind the betting booth was boxed; a man running behind there could not have got away; both men had seen the young fellow dodge behind the booth, and yet he was nowhere to be seen; no one was in sight but the old man.

"Are you sure you did not see any one run behind here?"

"I am sure. Certainly no one has been around here but me. I say, do you want a tip on the races?"

"What's your tip?"

"Long, auburn curls, lovely blue eyes, a pretty figure, and rich."

The two men stared. One of them drew a pistol, cocked it, approached the old man, clapped it to his temple, and demanded:

"What do you mean?"

The old man did not budge. He merely repeated:

"Long, auburn curls, lovely blue eyes, a pretty figure, and rich."

"Shoot the old villain!" cried the companion.

The man did not shoot, however, for the old man by one skillful movement of his foot threw the armed man to the ground, and like a cat he leaped forward and dealt No. 2 a kick that downed him, and the old man disappeared like a flash of light. The two men once again arose to their feet, and No. 1 said:

"Nesbitt, that old man and the young man are the same."

"What does it mean?"

"It's a shadow."

"I've an idea, Frenchy, we can make something out of this. Mr. Brown has a secret."

"That's what I've been thinking."

"I thought so when we got such a big sum for the little kindness we did him."

"I've been thinking a good deal about him."

"His runaway daughter, eh?"

The two men laughed, and then Frenchy said:

"We must go slow, Nesbitt. Brown may be at the bottom of our little experience within the last half hour."

"We can tell whether or not it's his game. If it is not, we can make him come down."

"We may do better; we may recover the prize."

"There is something in that."

"In the meantime, we will keep our eyes open for this transformer."

CHAPTER II

SOME men, through personal peculiarities, are dubbed with *sobriquets* which comprehensively describe them; sometimes their personal appearance suggests a *sobriquet*, but more frequently traits of character. For a number of years a young man had spent most of his time around New York in the company of noted detectives. He was a handsome young fellow, appeared to have plenty of money, and was noted for varied accomplishments. He was slick and smooth; his movements were springy; he talked in a low, subdued tone of voice, and the detectives had learned to call him "Velvet." The softness and smoothness of his manner made the *sobriquet* singularly comprehensive and appropriate. The young man had become a sort of volunteer aid to the best officers, and he had rendered many a good service. He was known to be brave and a perfect athlete. There was a mystery about him which none of his associates had been able to penetrate. He was a quiet, cheerful fellow, and would disappear and reappear upon the most opportune occasions. At times many questions had been put to him concerning his identity; but all that was ever ascertained was the fact that his name was Dick Velsor; that he was born in New York, had been educated in Europe, and seemed to have an unlimited command of money.

Just before the opening of our narrative, a well-known New

York officer had made a strange discovery. Dick Velsor and the officer in question had gone to Coney Island on a hot afternoon for a swim. They had taken adjacent bathing-houses. The city officer left the water first, and upon returning to his bath-house, by mistake entered the wrong door. He did not notice his mistake, and in pulling down a towel he knocked a part of Dick Velsor's clothing to the floor, and there rolled out a badge. The officer picked it up to restore it, having discovered his mistake as to the rooms, and as he did so he made a second discovery. At once he entered his own room, and half an hour later—Dick Velsor having come in and dressed—joined his comrade on the piazza of the hotel. The two men sat smoking and taking it easy, when suddenly Dick's companion said:

"Dick, you're a sly bird."
Young Velvet smiled in his quiet way as he said: "How so?"
"You never talk about yourself."
"Why should I, Harry?"
"You're up to something, lying around New York."
"What's come over you?"
"You and I are good friends; why don't you open up?"
"What would you have?"
"Solve the mystery."
"I am not in the midst of any mystery."
"You have been laying around with a few of us for a year or two, and we know nothing about you. I am pretty close to you, and I do not even know where you live: you disappear and then pop up again; you are a sort of will-o'-the-wisp."
"There's no mystery about me."
"You've some business here in New York. Why don't you open up? You may get some aid in the way of a few points."
"You are very kind, Harry, very kind, and if I need points I'll come to you."
"I wish you'd do one thing."
"I'll do it if I can."
"You've made a promise and you are a man who always keeps his word. I want to ask you a strange question. Are you a regular?"

Dick Velsor started and seemed a little annoyed, but asked:
"Do you insist upon an answer?"
"No. I've taken you at a disadvantage, but I'd like an answer, all the same."
"I like you, Harry. If I'd trust any man, I'd trust you."
"You will never regret it, if you need a friend."
"It's an odd—yes, a very strange story I have to tell. I do not recollect ever having seen my father or mother. I recollect, as a little boy, playing around a big house in France. I remember an old woman whom I called nurse, and an old man whom I called Uncle Victor. When I became old enough to think, I commenced to ask questions of old Victor. I saw other boys who had their mammas and papas, and one day I asked:
"Where is my mamma and papa?"
"The old man looked startled, and answered:
"Your mamma and papa are in heaven."
"Shortly after this I was taken to a school in England and remained there until I was fourteen, and then I returned to France. Old Uncle Victor came after me. He did not take me to the same house where I had lived as a babe. He showed me around Paris for a few days, and then I was taken to a school many miles from Paris. I remained in that school for two years. Then one day the master of the school told me I must go to Paris. I was introduced to a gentleman who was to accompany me. I arrived in Paris, and later was taken to the home of my early childhood, and then followed a revelation. I was taken into a room, and on a bed lay my old friend Uncle Victor. I saw at a glance that he was a very sick man. He beckoned me to a seat beside the bed, bid every one leave the room, and after a moment, said:
"Richard, on my dying bed I am about to break a solemn oath made under peculiar conditions; and I believe that in breaking the oath I am only doing what is right and just."
"Uncle Victor, do not imperil your soul on my account," I said.
"I have consulted a father in the church. He tells me the oath I made is not binding, that it is my duty to break it, and in breaking the oath I do justice to you."
"Fifteen years ago I was employed at a hotel in Aix-les-Bains. One night an American arrived from Paris. It was after midnight—a cold, bitter night—and the snow lay deep on the ground. I met the traveler at the depot and accompanied him to the hotel. He had a child with him bundled up in many wraps. He went to his room, and would have nothing for himself, only milk for the child, and he fed the child with his own hands. I remained in the room, and I observed a strange, wild look in the stranger's eyes as he tenderly attended the child. He was a strong, healthy little fellow, a little less than two years of age. When the child was put to bed, I started to leave the room, but was called back by the stranger, who demanded my name. He then asked me many other questions, and all the time appeared to be very thoughtful. Finally he said:
"You are not rich?"
"No; I have nothing but my monthly salary," I answered.
"Would you like to live at ease the rest of your life?"
"I would," I answered.
"If you were to swear an oath, could you keep it?"
"I could," I answered.
"Again he was thoughtful, and then, pointing to the bed, said:
"If you were made rich, would you and your sister be willing to take care of that child?"
"Gladly," I answered.
"The stranger was silent a long time, then he said:
"I will make you an offer. There are reasons why I do not

wish this child ever to know what may occur or has occurred in this room. I wish to make other conditions, and if you are willing to accept them, I will put in your hands a sum that will yield you an annual income of fifteen thousand francs."

"I thought I'd go blind upon hearing this proposition, and when I could speak—yes, for a moment I was speechless—I said:
"I will carry out any stipulations you may make."

"My stipulations are very brief. The child is of American parentage. I wish an English nurse so he will learn English. When he is ten or twelve years of age I want him sent to school in England; afterward put at school in France. And the oath I require is that you never tell the child one fact connected with his history, save that he is of American birth. You must never tell him how he came under your care. You must tell him you know nothing about his parentage, save the fact that both his parents are dead. Can you swear to this?" he demanded.

"I can," I answered. "I do not know anything of his parentage. You say that they are dead, and there is no need that I should ever tell him how he came under my care."

"You will swear to do as you promise?"

"I will."

"At his dictation, I pronounced a terrible oath, and then we talked over the details. Ere daylight, I should take the child to my sister. He did not want any one to know he had brought the infant to the hotel. Just before daylight I carried the child away, and, later, I held a long talk with the stranger. He gave me many instructions, and then placed in my hands United States bonds sufficient to yield me the income agreed upon. Then he placed in my hands an additional number of bonds, the income of which was to pay all the expenses of your care and education. He then placed in my care a little tin box, which he said I must keep and never open, but any time after you were sixteen I was at liberty to give the box and key to you, and in case of my death the box should be delivered to you unopened. He gave me many directions, and, later in the day, bid me adieu, and took the train for Turin."

"This was the tale," said Dick, "that the old man told me."

"A strange romance," said Harry, his friend.

"Yes, a strange, romantic tale. I asked him if he had ever seen the man afterward, and he said:

"No."

"And the old man died?"

"Yes, two months succeeding his strange revelation to me."

"And what did you find in the box?"

"One hundred thousand dollars of United States bonds."

"No letters—no missive explaining the mystery?"

"Nothing but the bonds, unregistered bonds, negotiable at any time. I also received from the old man the bonds which had been deposited with him to secure an income for my maintenance and education. The others, with my consent, he willed to a relative who was old, needy, and helpless."

"Dick, are you a regular?"

"Yes; I am attached to the department of San Francisco."

"And your mission is?"

"To find my parents."

"Dick," said Harry, "your secret shall be held as sacred by me as you will hold it yourself."

"Thank you."

"Have you any clues?"

"Yes; when I have studied them up I will consult with you."

Dick and Harry became close friends.

CHAPTER III.

In his effort to obtain some clues that would lead to a solution of the mystery of his birth Dick had been led to San Francisco, and from there he had shadowed to New York. He had met with just a shadow of success, but, as intimated, he had fallen upon another mystery which, for the time being, drew him away from a shadow in the direction of his own affairs, and led him to become interested in another and very singular and startling mystery.

About two weeks succeeding the talk our hero had held with his friend Harry, the regular New York detective, he was over in Jersey City. It was after midnight when he started to return. He was compelled to wait for a boat, and while so doing he observed a lady heavily veiled pacing up and down in the ferry-house. Her figure was graceful, and her movements plainly suggested youth and vigor. Dick had never thought much about ladies. His associates were men, and almost entirely detectives; but as his eyes rested on the graceful figure of the veiled lady there came to him a strange and unaccountable interest, and he watched her closely.

Just before the arrival of the boat—and it was the half-past twelve boat—three rough-looking young men passed through the ferry-gates, evidently intending to cross to New York. They talked loud, and were of that class who care only for their own comfort and convenience. Dick discovered that their attention was attracted toward the young lady, who was unconscious of the attention she was attracting, and when the boat was fastened to the bridge, walked briskly aboard and seated herself in the ladies' cabin. The three men followed, and instead of going to the men's side of the boat they stood on the side at the door of the women's cabin. Our hero sauntered aboard and stood near the men, and he overheard their talk.

"Say, Billy," remarked one of the men, "I'd like to see the face under that veil. Dollars to cents she's a beauty. She's a step like a fawn. I am going to see her face."

"Wait till she leaves the boat, and then you can raise that veil."

"Bet you a fiver," said the third man, "there's a fellow to meet her on the other side."

"Good enough! We'll give him a thump on the head and take a peep at her pretty face, all the same."

Dick made up his mind that if there was a young fellow to meet the lady, he should not be alone in resisting an assault on the part of the young ruffians; and in case the girl was alone he would act as a sort of protector, and take the chances of a thump.

The boat reached the New York side. The lady started to go ashore, and, as it appeared, there was no escort to meet her. She was alone and unprotected. Dick kept close to the men following and watching the veiled lady, and he heard one of them say:

"She is alone."

"Come on, boys! I'll see her face, and if she's a beauty she shall give a fellow a kiss as a penalty for being out so late."

The lady crossed West Street, and walked rapidly up Cortlandt Street, turned into Greenwich Street, and passed along. It is a lonely place at night. Had the lady kept up Cortlandt Street she would have run less risk, owing to the fact that she would have met many going toward the ferry. The moment she started along Greenwich Street the three men hastened their steps. They soon caught up to her. One of them ran ahead, seized her, and attempted to raise her veil; but the next instant he was dragged off and received a whack square between the eyes that sent him down as though struck by a falling beam from the elevated railroad. His companions leaped forward to down Dick; but they found out they were treeing a tiger instead of a possum, for in turn each received a clip that sent him spinning.

The lady was a witness to the scene. She appeared to realize what had occurred. She saw that the three men had intended to assail her and that they had all been knocked down by a valiant young man who had run to her rescue.

Dick, having disposed of the three men, said to the lady:

"I will see you safely home."

He offered his arm. The lady accepted it, and said:

"Thank you."

They turned up Fulton Street toward Broadway.

"I knew those men were following me," the lady said.

"Then why did you not keep right on up Cortlandt Street?"

"I did not think they would dare follow me; and I thought I saw a policeman as I reached the corner. If they followed me, I intended to appeal to the officer. But if I saw one, he singularly disappeared, and they came upon me; but, thanks to you, I am saved from their insults."

"It is dangerous for a lady to travel alone at such an hour."

"It is, and only the most pressing need would have led me to stay out until such a late hour."

Dick was strangely charmed. The lady's voice was musical, and he wished he could see her face. He was thinking of some innocent stratagem that would afford him the pleasure. The opportunity did not appear. At length they were at the verge of a very questionable neighborhood, when the lady said:

"I am very much obliged to you, and I will excuse you now. You are very kind and valiant; may you always be happy."

"Why do you bid me go?"

"I am near my home now."

"Do you feel that I have rendered you a service?"

"Yes, a great service."

"Would you repay me if you could?"

"I would, gladly."

"Let me see your face."

"I can not," came the prompt answer.

"Why not?"

"I would rather you would always think you had done a service to a pretty girl; it will prove a pleasanter recollection."

"And you refuse me so slight a return for my service?"

"I do."

"You are cruel."

"I would be more cruel were I to let you see my face."

"In spite of what you say I press my request."

"I'd rather have you rest under a delusion."

"You are too careful of my feelings."

"No; I am thinking of my own. I'd rather have you think of me as beautiful. It will be a pleasant recollection for me."

"You will leave me lost in perplexity. I may never see you again. I will always feel that it would have been a pleasure to see the face under that veil."

At that moment an officer came along. He did not speak to the pair, but he stood a little way off and was watching them.

"I will go with you."

"No; leave me here."

"That officer may follow you."

"I do not fear him."

"I do. I can not tell you why; but I am unfortunate. Let me go a little way with you."

Dick Velsor was cute. He saw that the presence of the officer would lead to an immediate separation, and he would have failed in his purpose to see the lady's face. His curiosity had been whetted. Her voice was so pleasant, her speech so piquant, her step so light, her general movements so graceful, he knew she was beautiful. He felt a charm in her presence such as he had never experienced before in the presence of women. It was a splendid stroke when he touched her sympathies by the statement that he was unfortunate. As they walked along very slowly, the lady said:

"How are you unfortunate?"

"Ah! I can not tell you."

"And you wish to avoid the police?"

"Yes."

"Are you a fugitive?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"Do not press for an answer."

"Are you innocent?" There was a singular earnestness in the lady's tone as she asked the strange question.

Dick enjoyed the situation. He had struck a line likely to prolong his talk with the veiled beauty, as he believed her to be.

"Do not force me to answer. What interest can you have in my good or bad fortune?"

"You have been kind to me."

"I am innocent," said Dick.

"And you have been wrongfully accused?"

"Do not ask me to say more."

"It is strange," said the veiled lady.

"What is strange?"

"Do not ask me to say more," she answered, with a laugh.

"You are very charming."

"Well, I can permit you to say and think so, as we will never meet again."

"You appear very certain."

"I am, and I will say one word to you: if you are innocent, be not discouraged. All will come right in the end, and if you are under a cloud, do not be driven to actual guilt."

"You are a good adviser. I wish you had not said we would never meet again."

"Were I to gratify your request, you would not desire to meet me again."

"You are mistaken."

"No, I am not."

"Now leave me," the lady said, as they halted once more.

"Let me see your face."

The lady hesitated a moment, and then said:

"It may be the quickest way to cause you to say good-night."

She raised her veil, and Dick started back with a cry of horror.

CHAPTER IV.

No wonder the young man recoiled in horror, for a more hideous face was never disclosed by an upraised veil.

"I told you so!" came the voice, sweet and musical.

"I am amazed!" exclaimed Dick, involuntarily.

"I preferred to have you rest under a delusion; but there comes to you one consolation: you can forget this adventure now."

"I will not forget it. We shall meet again."

"Why do you desire that we should meet again?"

"Because I am no fool."

The lady had lowered her veil. They were standing under the glare of a street lamp. Dick had approached close to her. His features were working under conflicting emotions. She caught a full view of his handsome face, and an exclamation burst from her lips. She stepped forward nervously, seized his arm, and demanded:

"What is your name?"

Dick was taken all aback, and he could never afterward understand the impulse that caused him to say:

"I dare not tell you my name."

"Why did you say we should meet again?"

"We can not always explain why we say certain things."

"Well, we may meet again."

"Will you agree to meet me?"

"No."

"You said we might meet again, what did you mean?"

"I was merely echoing what you said: we might meet again."

"There is a mystery about you."

"You are a romancer, I see; but we will say good-night."

Dick had formed a certain resolution. He had made a certain discovery. He was confused and perplexed. He knew that indeed there was a mystery about the veiled lady. He, on the instant, determined to solve the mystery.

Dick responded "Good-night," and the veiled woman walked away. Dick maintained his position; but quickly he worked one of his magic changes. He had invented many very wonderful contrivances that enabled him to work a transform which may well be termed magical. Having worked his transform, he darted after the veiled woman. It was his purpose to dog her to her home; but there appeared to be magic other than his own, for in the most mysterious manner the woman disappeared. He did not recall that he had looked away for an instant; but she had disappeared, and when he advanced to the place where he had last seen her, she was gone.

He made a thorough search. The vicinity was crowded with mean-looking tenement houses. It was not the sort of place where one would expect to find the residence of a charming and cultivated woman; and the veiled woman, even though hideously homely, was cultivated, and as Dick thought matters over, he came to other conclusions. Finally he walked away, and as he did so, he muttered:

"I will meet her again; I will solve this mystery, for indeed there is a mystery connected with that woman."

As the young man walked along, he recalled what occurred during his brief walk with the strange lady, and her sudden interest in him when she demanded his name.

Dick reached Broadway. He was walking along, lost in deep thought, when a hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Halloo, my friend?"

"Well, what do you want?" said Dick.

"Come with me."

"You're cool."

"That should suit you, for it's a warm night."

"You've made a mistake, Johnny, and treed the wrong animal."

"I want to have a chat with you."

Dick was fond of odd adventures, and he said:

"I am at your service."

"That's right. We will go and have a little refreshment."

Dick was a little hungry, and he felt it would be a good joke to

eat a meal at the expense of the stranger, and then give him a good surprise, and possibly a thump or two for good measure.

There are dozens of all-night refreshment houses in New York. The stranger led Dick down a side street, and they entered a low sort of place and sat at a table. Dick was full of sweet anticipations, and ready for a scrimmage when the proper time should come. He was not only a magical disguiser, but a magical hitter, when necessity required. He had great confidence in himself, and had formed a certain idea as to the character of the man who had, kindly or otherwise, invited him to have a meal.

The two had been seated but a few moments, when the stranger said, abruptly:

"Now, old man, uncover!"

Dick was taken a little aback, but he had learned to keep cool under exciting circumstances, and he calmly answered:

"That would indicate that you had dropped to the fact that I was under a cover. Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm Tommy."

"Tommy, have you any right to order me to uncover?"

"Yes."

"Do you know I've been to a mask ball?"

"Over in Jersey, then; for there has been no mask ball in New York to-night."

"I've no reason for not uncovering; but I'd like to ask your right to command it."

"I've got you."

"Got your bangle with you?"

"Never mind my bangle. You uncover."

Dick threw back the lapel of his coat and displayed a badge. The man started back, and then, leaning down, examined the bangle, and then he ejaculated:

"Ginger! is that the trick? It looks regular."

"It is regular."

"Here's my hand. Old man, you have given me a surprise. What's your name?"

"Now you ask too much."

"I've a surprise for you."

"Well, I got in the first one. I'm ready to take my clip."

"We're on the same lay."

"What's that?"

Dick was very much surprised. But he did not suspect the real meaning of the other man's words.

"Oh, you're working funny business."

"See here."

The stranger drew back the lapel of his coat and disclosed a San Francisco bangle like Dick's.

"How's that?"

"You do surprise me."

"Well, turn about. How long have you been on the case?"

"Well, some time."

"Have you picked up anything?"

"I don't know that we are on the same case."

"What case are you on?"

"Now you ask too much."

"What's your name?"

"My name is Shanley."

"Come off!"

"You don't believe me?" said Dick, laughing.

"You're Dick Velsor."

"What makes you think so?"

"Orders. I got it that Dick was in New York. You're either Dick or Billy Benson."

"Is Billy Benson in New York?"

"Why do you try to work me?"

"Because I do not know who you are."

"You know I am not Billy Benson?"

"Yes."

"Then I am the other one."

"And the other one is—"

"Louis Bragg."

"Louis, let's shake."

The two men did shake, and then our hero remarked:

"Louis, I am afraid you've made a mistake."

"Will you stick to it you are not Dick Velsor?"

"I'll own up; I am Dick Velsor."

"Then how have I made a mistake?"

"We are not on the same case. I am on special work."

"So am I."

"What case are you on?"

"What case are you on?"

"I put my question in first, and you promised to talk right up."

"Let me see your bangle."

Dick permitted Bragg to examine his shield, and the latter said:

"It's all square."

"Square as a die."

"Ain't you on the Belden case?"

"Will you tell me about the Belden case?" asked Dick.

CHAPTER V.

"COME off! What are you giving me?" cried Bragg.

"On my honor, I know nothing about the Belden case."

"Not on the case at all? Why are you here?"

"On special leave and to work up an old case."

"But you've heard about the Belden case?"

"Not a word."

"Well, you get me; but it's a great case. Don't you take the California papers?"

"No."

"I'll give it to you. Belden was a rich old miser in California. He resided in a town less than fifty miles from the city. His

daughter, a widow, lived with him, and a young lady, known as Louise Belden, but her real name was Webster. She is no relation to the old man. She is the daughter of a former partner. Belden was a retired merchant; an eccentric old fellow. He held a large trust fund. Well, this ward, Louise Webster, was trusted and treated like his own child, but she returned the kindness shown her by attempting to murder old Belden, and she did steal bonds and cash and other valuable property and disappeared with every penny of the trust funds. She managed it skillfully and escaped, and she has not been found. There is a reward of one hundred thousand dollars for her arrest and conviction."

Dick listened with absorbing interest. Strange, wild, startling thoughts were running through his mind; but finally he recovered his self-possession, and asked:

"Is old Belden dead?"

"Yes; he died some months later from the wound he received."

"You have a description of the Webster girl?"

"Yes."

"Is it sure that she was the assassin and the thief?"

"Yes."

"What was the motive?"

"She was possessed of an idea that the property really belonged to her; that old Belden had robbed her father."

"Are there any grounds for her suspicions?"

"It is said not."

"Is there no one else under suspicion?"

"No one."

"The proofs are positive against the girl?"

"Yes."

"You say old Belden's daughter lived with him?"

"Yes."

"What sort of a woman is she?"

"She is mildly insane, through some great sorrow."

"Do you know the cause of her sorrow?"

"No; there is a mystery about her; it is a family secret."

"What are the facts that led to the fixing of the crime on the girl Louise Webster?"

"The chief has all the proofs. He has not disclosed them. All he wants is to capture the girl."

"Have you any clues?"

"I have none. The chief has proofs which lead him to think the thief and murderess has taken refuge here in New York. We have all the descriptions, photos, and everything, and it is our business to find her."

"You say Belden is dead? Who is prosecuting the case?"

"The executor."

"Is he the executor of Belden's estate?"

"No; the daughter has come into full possession of a portion; the executor assigned on the trust fund offers the reward."

"You say the daughter is a widow? What is her name?"

"She has resumed her maiden name."

"Did you ever see the daughter?"

"No; I never saw any of the parties. I was merely sent on here to run down the girl-murderess."

"And Billy Benson is on the same case?"

"Yes."

"How long has he been in New York?"

"About a month."

"And he has struck nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Isn't there a possibility that the accused girl is innocent?"

"No."

"What makes you so certain?"

"Why did she run away? And the chief, it appears, has positive proof of her guilt."

Dick Velsor was very thoughtful, and the strangest possibilities were presented to his mind, and they were associated with a certain adventure of that very night.

"Then you have no proof that she is in New York?"

"The chief has all the proofs, and he is fully satisfied."

"Can you give me any of the details of the attempted murder and robbery?"

"No; the chief sent us on here to find the girl."

"Have you any photographs?"

"One taken when she was about fifteen, and a full description."

"How old would this ward be now?"

"About twenty-two."

"She is handsome?"

"Very handsome."

"And the daughter is the heiress of Belden's estate?"

"Yes."

"Is she in full possession?"

"No; there is a trustee. She has a portion."

"There is a residuary legatee?"

"That I do not know."

"Where is Miss Belden?"

"She resides in San Francisco now. But you have become very much interested?"

"Yes; it is a strange case."

"It is. And now that I have told you my business here, what is yours?"

"The same case; but my instructions followed me here. I had no particulars; I was only instructed to look for the girl."

"Of course you have no clues?"

"Not anything worth mentioning."

"When will I see you again?"

"I think we had better work on separate lines. If we go in a squad we will not accomplish as much."

"All right. You know Benson?"

"I've met him."

"Does he know you?"

"He would not remember me."

"You must meet him."

"I will in good time."

It was well on toward morning when Dick Velsor started for his home.

As has been intimated, Dick was pretty well off. He had received the bonds intact which the mysterious stranger had left for him, and their accumulations. He lived in a little house up-town, where he kept bachelor apartments. He had an old French woman acting as his housekeeper. She was old, but capable and strong enough to look after the home of a single gentleman. As the detective walked toward his home, he was very thoughtful, and he muttered:

"Well, it is just possible I've struck something; and if it is true, well, I've my idea."

Next day Dick appeared upon the street about noon, and he proceeded direct to the vicinity where he had parted from the woman who had shocked him by revealing to him her hideous face.

"I reckon I don't take any stock in that," he said.

The young man spent the whole afternoon in the neighborhood, and it was nearly evening when he espied a female of graceful form walking along the street. He had not noticed where she came from, but he discovered that she was veiled, of graceful figure and buoyant step, and he said:

"At last!"

He followed the woman, and he noticed that she was very stealthy in her movements. Only a keen and observant person would have observed this fact. She went up toward one of the great hotels; passed and repassed the building several times, like one who was on the look-out for a person she expected to meet; and so night fell and our hero was still on the shadow.

If the veiled woman expected to meet any one she was evidently disappointed, for about ten o'clock she walked down Broadway, and finally passed to Third Avenue at Fourteenth Street. Dick was well pleased. He was certain that it was the lady with the hideous face, and he made up his mind to renew his acquaintance. He was following her, keeping up a close trail, when suddenly he received a blow from behind that keeled him over. He fell like a log, and for a moment lay dazed. No one had seen the blow struck, but a gentleman came along before he was able to rise to his feet. The stranger assisted him to rise, and said:

"My friend, you had better go home."

The stranger evidently thought that Dick was drunk, and the detective determined to let the impression prevail, and he said, stuttering like a drunken man:

"Yes, I will go home."

The stranger passed on and Dick staggered off, but when an opportunity offered he dodged into a beer saloon. He went through to the rear yard, and when he returned it was a different man, seemingly, who left the place. The detective had worked one of his magical transforms. He did not stagger, but moved with a buoyant step, and as he walked along he thought over the fact of the blow he had received. The fact that he had been knocked down while following the veiled woman was very suggestive. It indicated that the woman had confederates; that she had fallen to the fact that she was being shadowed; that she had signaled to a pal, and the pal had followed him, and had most probably downed him with an eel-skin. He had received a hard blow, but it had left no bruise. As the young man thought over the incident, a pleasant romance he had woven was dispelled, and a terrible suspicion and confirmation ran through his mind; for the adventure was fraught with most terrible suggestions.

CHAPTER VI.

Our hero had associated the veiled lady whom he had met on the previous night with the Louise Webster who stood accused as the robber of many thousands of dollars' worth of securities, and he had conceived that she was innocent. His belief was founded on the assumption that the veiled girl was really Louise Webster; and then the peculiar tones of her voice and her earnest manner when she had said to him: "You are innocent."

Since his second adventure his pleasant romance had been dispelled, and his later suspicions were based upon the assumption that the veiled woman whom he had been trailing was the same veiled girl he had met on the previous evening. The actions of the woman he met on the first night admitted of a belief in her innocence of any charge. The actions of the girl or veiled woman he had been following on the second night left him with very different impressions. If they were one and the same person—and he had no reason to doubt the affirmative conclusion—then she was indeed a guilty woman. She was the associate of murderous characters, and was in hiding as a real criminal. The later conclusion made him feel sad and greatly disappointed, and caused him to come to a determined resolution, and he muttered:

"If she is guilty, she is an evil person—a dangerous person, and she should be brought to justice, and I will run her down."

Dick was greatly mortified that he had permitted himself to be dropped off his feet so easily. He was like many young men of the present day—a magnificent athlete, a man of splendid strength; active, agile, and possessed of great endurance—and, besides, his shrewdness had received a setback. He was convinced that there had been a double trail, and he had not fallen to the fact. The veiled woman had been smarter. She had discovered that a stranger was dogging her. She had passed a signal all unknown to him, and he had been dropped off the shadow as easily as though he were a cripple.

"It's all right!" he muttered; "but I will be up to snuff next time, you can wager."

He wandered down the Bowery, looking around in every direc-

tion, but he did not meet the veiled woman, and finally he ejaculated as a thought ran through his mind:

"By ginger! it is possible."

He leaped on a car and rode back to the vicinity of the great hotel. Fortune favored him. He saw the veiled woman. She had just stepped forward and addressed a well-attired young man. The two walked off together, and our hero fell to the trail. He saw them enter the park and sit down on one of the benches. He did not dare go near, but he watched. They sat together for some time, and then the lady rose, and Dick heard her say:

"I am glad to have met you. Be here to-morrow night, and we will talk further."

"You have not let me see your face," the young man said.

"To-morrow," came the answer.

"Well, young fellow," thought Dick, "if you see the same face I saw last night, you will consider your time lost."

"Let me have one glimpse?"

"You will betray me."

"What do you take me for?"

"You are a friend of my husband."

The young man's curiosity was whetted, and he exclaimed:

"Your secret will be safe with me."

"No; you misunderstand. You can do me a kindness."

"Name it."

"Not now; to-morrow night when we meet."

"I will die before to-morrow night if I do not see your face."

There came a laugh from under the veil, and the woman said:

"I guess you will live, and you must not make a mistake concerning me."

"Oh, certainly not."

"I sought you because you can do me a kindness."

"You can depend that I will. What can I do for you?"

"I will tell you to-morrow; and now I bid you good-night."

"One moment. I have many friends, with young and handsome wives. You leave me to suspect your identity among them all. It is not fair."

"You will be suspicious only until to-morrow night."

"And you will meet me again?"

"Yes; and unfold to you the service you can do me."

"Why did you select me?"

"Because you are frequently my husband's companion."

"Come, raise that veil."

"You must be patient."

The young man's whole manner had changed, and there was severity in his tones.

"See here, I will see your face now."

"How dare you?"

"I do dare," he said. "And let me say, you've struck the wrong man. Up with your veil and deliver!"

Dick was greatly interested in the scene. He saw that there was fun ahead. The young man had spoken with great determination, and the woman again exclaimed:

"How dare you? What has come over you?"

"I know you, madame. And now, up with your veil and deliver, or I hand you over to the police."

The young man had just uttered the words, when he reeled over and fell to the ground, and the woman disappeared. A bold and daring robbery and assault had taken place right under our hero's eyes. The woman had slipped away like a disappearing shadow, and the young man arose to his feet; but he was confused and dazed. Dick caught a glimpse of his face sufficiently distinct to recognize him again ere he followed the woman. He came upon her talking to another man. Dick saw her pass something to the man. He crept up close enough to hear the man say:

"You did it well; what did you get?"

"His watch, his diamonds, and his wallet."

"He'll never say a word about it. It's a good night's work. You are a darling. You have saved me, dearest."

"But oh! at what a cost!"

"Nothing will come of it."

"This is the second time I have been led into a crime. Never ask me again."

"Hush, hush! All is right now."

"Go back and learn what is said of the affair and tell me."

"I will. Where will you be?"

The woman named a certain corner and a certain hour.

"I will be on hand, otherwise I will send you a message."

"By whom?"

"Some one who will wear a white rose in his coat."

"And you will let me know all?"

"Yes. You are a darling; but go now. It is just possible a cop may swing around this way."

The woman walked off, and Dick's heart bled for her, the tool of the man who had urged her on to commit a crime. It had been a deliberate robbery; one of the most daring that could have been perpetrated. Dick felt that he would like to follow the woman, but his duty demanded that he should follow the man. The proposed meeting that was to take place later on, however, would permit of his carrying out both schemes. He determined to follow the man, and to secure a white rose. He would meet the woman later on, but duty demanded that he should recover the watch, the diamonds, and the wallet.

The man walked off with a chuckle. Dick was on the shadow. He heard the man mutter:

"I'll not meet her to-night. But she did it well; she's a jewel California never turned out a brighter woman."

The last words fell on Dick's ear like a death-knell. Now he had proof the most positive that the veiled woman and Louise Webster were one and the same.

The man went along Broadway. Dick was at his heels. The fellow entered a gambling-place, as most criminals do; it is the one

place they haunt. Dick followed. He saw the man play. Dick got into the game. He was a loser; the other man was a winner; and it was well on toward two o'clock in the morning when the man quit the game and departed. Dick had exchanged several words with the man, and when he started to leave, Dick departed with him. Our hero had shown a great deal of money. He had lost with a smile, and the confederate of the female thief was not averse to the continuance of the acquaintance. Once outside, the man said:

"Let's go and have a bite and a bottle. What do you say?"
 "Go with me," said Dick.
 "You are a loser. I'll treat. I am a winner."
 "That doesn't make any difference; I'll make up to-morrow."
 "You take it easy."
 "Oh, yes."
 "It's good fun to win."
 "Well, it's excitement to win or lose. I like to kill time."
 "Anything on your mind?"
 "Ask me something easy."
 "Oh, I am not pressing for an answer."

The man was quite interested. He thought he saw a goose for future plucking, and he said:

"You will go with me on my invitation?"
 "All right."

The two men walked along. Neither one was under the influence of wine; nor did they pretend to be, and their meeting was purely conventional and commonplace. Such acquaintances are formed in all large cities the world over.

"I know a snug little place where we can get a good chop and a good bottle," the man said.

"We will go there. I am hungry."

The two men reached the place, and soon were snugly seated at a table in a quiet corner.

CHAPTER VII.

"WHAT will you eat?" asked our hero's companion.

"You will let me order," came the declaration.

"No, sir; you will eat with me."

"Look at me sharp," said Dick. "Don't you recognize me?"

"No."

"I recognize you," said Dick, again laughing.

"You recognize me?" said the man, turning pale.

"I am from San Francisco; a Golden Gate man."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing; you're off."

"I am?"

"You think you've seen me in California?"

"Yes, sure."

"Never—for the best reason in the world; I've never been in California in my life."

"Well, we'll have our feed and bottle, and I'll let you study me up, and if you don't recognize me, I'll make myself known."

"You are laboring under a mistake."

"I'll bet a hundred I will convince you that I know you."

"You may be betting on a sure thing."

"I am."

"Then I won't bet."

The men had ordered their chop and a bottle, and the man who was with our hero had become a little nervous and uneasy. They finished their meal and drank their wine, and at length Dick asked:

"Haven't you placed me yet?"

"No."

"I promised to prove that I knew you?"

"Yes."

The waiter brought a check. Dick had ordered it. The other man attempted to pay, but Dick said:

"No; I will pay for this. I must pay for it."

"Why, I asked you to come here with me."

"Let me pay and I'll explain."

"All right. Have your own way."

The man showed signs of great uneasiness and mystification. Dick paid, and said:

"I'll lead up to where I identify you."

"All right."

"You have a diamond in your pocket that don't belong to you."

"You lie!" he said, his face ashen white.

"You have a watch in your pocket that don't belong to you."

As it happened at the moment, there were only Dick and the thief in the room. The man made a movement as though to draw something.

"Don't," cautioned Dick. "I've got you covered."

"What does all this mean?"

"You have a wallet in your pocket that don't belong to you."

"You are a liar!"

"Pass them over to me."

"Pass what over to you?"

"The diamond, the watch, and the pocket-book; and you get off lucky."

"Who are you?" he demanded, becoming cool.

"I've proved I know you. Hand over the goods."

"You are laboring under a mistake."

"You know better; and you know I've got you dead to rights. But you're lucky."

"Why?"

"I can't arrest you unless you show fight, and then I will kill you. The swag ain't worth it; you love your life. But come; I saw her pass it over to you."

"Let's see your authority."

Dick drew aside his coat.

"It's against me," said the man, turning a ghastly hite, and slowly and sullenly glancing around the room.

"You're a dead man," said Dick, "if you try it. The odds are against you. I'm not alone. Come, hand over."

The man ran his hands down in his coat-pocket. He drew forth the articles named, and passed them over; and he muttered:

"It's tough!"

"You're in luck," said Dick, as he pocketed the goods.

"You don't nip me?"

"No."

"What is your game? It was a foolish question," said the man, as Dick laughed.

"Sure."

"And I am free to go?"

"Yes; but don't hurry."

"How did you get on to me?"

"I came along just as the swag was passed to you. Experience gave me the tip, and I fell to your trail."

"What do you mean to do?"

"I lost to-night?"

"Yes."

"I've made it up now."

"You might let a fellow in for a stake."

"I'm doing you well when I let you go."

"We'll meet again, mister," said the man.

"Possibly, yes."

"I dropped too easy."

"You've been compelled to drop, so that needn't trouble you."

"I may get the turn on you some day."

"All right; go home. Don't wander around to-night or you may go in. A friend of mine will keep you company."

The man understood the tip, and he was ready to curse. He did not understand why he was not taken in. Our hero went to find a white rose. His adventures for the night were not over.

Dick felt quite proud of his achievement. He had run down the receiver of the stolen goods, had recovered the swag, and had made a wily rogue sick. He succeeded in getting a white rose. He placed it where it was to be worn, and he then went where the woman was to await the messenger. Dick was fully convinced that he was on the track of the California bond thief, and he was also convinced that the woman with the hideous face and the woman-thief were one and the same, and as he walked along he muttered:

"I've got her dead to rights; but I am sorry for her. She is the tool of that scoundrel from whom I recovered the swag. I will force her to return the stolen bonds or put me on their track, then I will manage to save her, if I can. But the devil who controls her, and is urging her on, and instigating all these robberies, I'll run him down and get him out of the way. The woman shall have a chance; but, alas! my romance is dispelled. It is curious what a strange memory that woman's sweet voice has left in my heart; but her face—well, well! there is a mystery there, and I will solve that mystery to-night. I have her so I can scare her into a full confession. But, after all, there is one thing I do not like—the way she downed that young fellow she robbed. That looks bad, that looks as though she were hardened, despite her regretful words. The story of Louise Webster does not suggest that the girl was a hardened thief; but we can't tell. She may have been for a long time under the control of the scoundrel who put her up to the robbery. It's a strange case, and there are facts which appear very contradictory, but I will get at the bottom of it all, and I will do it to-night. Yes, I've got her in such a fix she will be compelled to own up, and I'll beat her mean-spirited and scheming pal."

Dick reached the place where the woman was waiting, and he was on time. He did not show up at once; he thought he would watch the woman and see how she acted. She walked to and fro; her movements were graceful, and our hero thought he detected little peculiarities that established beyond all question her identity as the heroine of his former adventure. He had watched her for some moments, when he stepped forward. He displayed his rose. The woman glanced at him but did not speak. Dick made sure that she saw the rose, and yet she did not speak. He advanced and said:

"I bring you a message."

The woman looked at him sharply, and said in a low tone:

"From whom?"

"From one whom you expected a message."

"Who am I, sir?"

"You are the party who was to be here in waiting, and you were to recognize the man who wore a white rose. You see the rose?"

"You are sure it is to be delivered to me? Who am I?"

"Frankly, I do not know."

"You were to deliver a message to one you do not know?"

"A woman standing here at this corner was to recognize a white rose. I wear the rose. You are standing here."

"You have made a mistake, my friend. It is very amusing. I am waiting for my husband, who will be along presently, and he may want to know how you dared address me."

"I can tell him just what I tell you."

"And your explanation may cost you your life."

"I will have to take the chance."

"You are bold."

"No; but the emergency is great."

"Explain what you mean," said the woman, eagerly.

"I have nothing to explain to you."

"You said you had a message for me."

"But you just told me I had made a mistake."

"It is possible I am the person," said the woman, after a pause.

"We had better wait until your husband comes."

"Oh, nonsense! give me the message."

"I can't."
 "Why not?"
 "I am not sure you are the person, and it is unfortunate that you are not, for there has been an unfortunate trip-up."
 "With whom?"
 "The sender of the message."
 "You can give me the message."
 "Not until I have proof that you are the right person."
 "I am the right person."
 "We will prove that when your husband comes."
 "My husband will not come."
 "That is just what I thought. You were giving me guff."
 "I am the one to receive the message."
 "I must ask you a few questions now. Who are you?"
 "The one who was waiting for the message."
 "And who was the message to come from?"
 "The message was to come from Arthur Fleet."
 "Can you describe Arthur Fleet?"
 "What is the use of wasting time? Give me your message."
 "It is a long one. But there's a cop watching us."
 "Come with me," said the woman, turning quickly.

CHAPTER VIII.

Dick walked away with the woman, and as they went, she said:
 "Come, let's stop all this play. Give me your message."

Dick was a little adrift. This veiled woman had a sharper voice and a bolder and more assured manner than the one he had met last night; and yet he knew that circumstances could easily account for the change. He remembered the cunning and self-possession of the first lady who had turned from Cortlandt Street, and who was really cool and self-possessed while he downed the three men; and then again her anxiety to get rid of him when she neared the vicinity of her home; and then again, this second veiled lady appeared to reside in the same vicinity; and still again she did possess a pleasant and musical voice when she spoke persuasively. But there was one other incident lacking: he did not feel the charm and strange fascination he had experienced the night before. He decided that the latter fact might be accounted for because of the revelation that had come concerning the woman's real character.

"I have more than a message to deliver."
 "Well, proceed."
 "I have a long story to tell. You were watched."
 The woman almost screamed.
 "What do you mean? Speak! speak! You alarm me."
 "Take me to your home. I will tell you all."
 There came a change over the woman's manner at once.
 "Take you to my home? That is a strange request."
 "We must go somewhere."
 "Why?"
 "There may be a devil on our track. I may have been shadowed to this meeting."
 The woman displayed great nervousness, and repeated:
 "Then why did you come? Why did you want to lead a devil to watch me?"
 "It was necessary that you should know what has happened."
 "My friend, I will confess I've been fooling you."
 "How could you?"
 "A woman's curiosity, you know. But all your allusions have been Greek to me."
 "Then I reckon I am wasting time. I will leave you."
 "As you please. But as you have said so much to me, you may tell me more."

"Not until I know who you are."
 "A lady told me to meet you. She said a man wearing a white rose was to bring a message to her. She said I must make sure that I met the right party. I am satisfied you are the right party. You can deliver the message to me or not, just as you choose."

"Did the lady expect a message from Arthur Fleet?"
 "Yes."
 "Why not take me to the lady, and let me deliver the message direct?"

"She will not meet you."
 "Can we not go somewhere?"
 "I will take you to the room of a friend of mine."
 "That will do."
 "I will give you a warning."
 "All right."
 "If you are playing any points it will be bad for you."
 "I will go anywhere."
 "You are too willing."
 "Well, then, I had better bid you adieu."
 "We will go to a place where we will be perfectly safe."
 "I said I would go anywhere."

The woman had led the way to a tumble-down old building. The parlor floor, as the signs indicated, had been turned into a bar-room and cheap restaurant.

"We will go in here," the woman said.
 "All right. Do you know the place?"
 "No. It is kept by an old Arab who knows only his own business."

"A wise man, I reckon."
 "He never bothers about other people's affairs."
 "He must be happy."
 "We will call for a cup of coffee."
 "Call for anything; I will pay for it."

The two entered the place. They sat down at a table, and a singular-looking old man awoke from a sleep behind the bar and advanced to take their order. The woman said:

"Sandy, bring us two cups of coffee and leave us alone."

The old man bowed and went away. He was gone fully ten minutes. While he was absent the woman said:

"Now deliver your message."
 "The message is from Arthur Fleet. He is in peril."
 The woman betrayed nervousness under her veil, and Dick said:
 "It would only be fair if you were to let me see your face before I deliver the message."
 "You are a very tantalizing man."
 "I am acting for others."
 "So am I."
 "Let me see your face."

"Well, look," came the answer; and the woman raised her veil. Dick looked, and his face was shadowed. It was not a handsome face he saw; it was the face of an old woman, not the hideous face he had had a glimpse of the previous night. He fell to the trick, however; he knew it was a worked face; he knew the woman was young; he knew she must have disclosed a comely face to her victim, the young man whom she robbed; and his face became shadowed because of the fact that the one hope he had indulged vanished. He had hoped, when the veil was raised, he would learn that the veiled woman he had met the previous night and the one he was facing now were different persons. As he looked upon the worked face, that faint hope vanished. He knew that the woman who had charmed him and the woman he had seen do a criminal deed were one and the same. Dick, all the time, was on his guard. He had seen how deftly the woman had downed the young man. He was determined that she should not take him off his guard and give him a similar dose.

"You are satisfied now?" said the woman.

"Yes, Miss Belden; I am satisfied."

The woman had not restored her veil, and she stared, and, at the same instant, the old man returned with two steaming cups of coffee.

"You can go, Sandy," said the woman.
 The old man nodded, and left the room, and Dick remarked:

"Does the old fellow know you as Miss Belden?"

"No; nor you, either. I do not pass myself as another."

"I may have made a mistake. How about Louise Webster?"

The woman dropped her veil, and laughingly said:

"What have I struck? Are you an idiot or drunk?"

"I may be an idiot. I am not drunk."

"What has Miss Belden or Miss Webster to do with the business you and I have in hand to-night?"

"Well, I thought it a good scheme for us to understand each other."

"All right. I will be either person you desire, Miss Belden or Miss Webster. Either name will suit me."

"You take it coolly."

"No use getting excited."

"You want the message?"

"Oh, suit yourself."

"I will tell you a tale. I will suppose a young woman is devoted to a bad man. Suppose this bad man is making the poor devoted woman do wicked acts; yes, criminal acts?"

"The woman would be very foolish to obey."

"Suppose the man was hard up; a gambler, a spendthrift, and suppose he should tell the woman he must have money?"

"Many men do that."

"Do you know such a man?"

"As you are supposing a case, please don't ask me direct and pertinent questions."

"Well, I've met such a man and such a woman."

"You will not have to go far to meet many such cases."

"I had a dream."

"Oh, it's a dream now?"

"Yes. Shall I tell you my dream?"

"Yes; while I sip my coffee. You are very entertaining, and the situation is so strange and romantic, I am enjoying it all."

"I dreamed that one night I saw the woman whom I knew meet a young man. She led him to a seat in a public park."

Dick stopped and watched the effect of his words. The woman calmly and coolly sipped her coffee, and did not wince.

"The woman sat down, and the young man beside her. Suddenly he leaped to his feet; he spoke hard words, the next instant fell over, struck down by the woman, who glided away."

Again Dick stopped, and the woman said coolly:

"What a funny dream! Did you wake up then?"

"No."

"I'd like to hear the rest of your dream. What became of the woman? and was the young man killed?"

"You're a dandy, madame!" was Dick's thought.

"The young man was not killed."

"How lucky not to be killed, even in a dream! And the woman, what became of her?"

"In my dream I followed her."

"You couldn't do her any real harm under those circumstances. And what did she do—disappear and you woke up wondering?"

"No; I dreamed to the end."

"What a funny dream! And you followed the woman?"

"She met a man."

"Dear me! and she ran away from you in your dream. Was she handsome?"

"I had not seen her face."

"Then she was veiled?"

"Yes."

"How funny! And what did she say to the man she met in your dream?"

"She handed the plunder over to him."

"Oh, she robbed the young man in your dream?"

"Yes."

The woman was as cool as though it were a dream, and Dick

gazed on her in amazement. She displayed the nerve of an old soldier.

CHAPTER IX.

Dick kept his glance fixed on the woman while he talked, and she returned at times his sharp gaze.

"The woman in my dream," continued Dick, "handed over all the stolen articles."

"What did she hand over in your dream?"

"A watch, some diamond studs, and a wallet."

"And she gave all the things to the man in your dream? Did they say anything in your dream?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what you heard in your dream."

"The man said it was splendidly done."

"The wretch! And what did she say?"

"She said she would never do it again. She said it was the second time she had done it, and she would never do it again."

"Poor thing!"

"Yes, poor thing, all my sympathies were aroused for her."

"Did you wake up then?"

"No."

"How strange! When I was a child, and had a dream like that, I would always wake up crying."

"I did not."

"It is so interesting; tell me all your dream."

"The woman went away."

"She left the man after giving him everything she had stolen in your dream?"

"Yes."

"And the wretch took everything. Well, he was mean. How lucky it was all a dream. Tell me the rest."

"When the man went away I followed him."

"How life-like your dream was!"

"Yes."

"You let the woman go in your dream and followed the man?"

"Yes."

"I should have thought you would have followed the woman."

"No. Something in my dream was revealed, and I thought I'd meet her again and follow the man."

"And why did you follow him?"

"I thought I'd recover the stolen articles."

Dick's eyes were fixed upon the woman as he made this statement, but she did not wince.

"And you recovered the articles in your dream?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't wake up then?"

"No."

"Well, well! I used to always wake up just as I secured the objects of my dream, and find I had nothing."

"That is usually the case; but mine was a peculiar dream."

"It is the funniest dream I ever heard of in all my life."

"Yes, it was a very remarkable dream."

"Well, what happened next? Where did the man go to—a pawn-shop, of course?"

"To a gambling den."

"And you followed him in there?"

"Yes."

"Did he play?"

"Yes."

"Where did he get the money?"

"He took it from the wallet before he went in."

"How wonderful! Dear me! your dream is like reality."

"Yes, very much."

"And the man—he lost all the money?"

"No; he won."

"Dear me!"

"And when he left the gambling den I followed him."

"How persistent you were in your dream!"

"Very."

"Did you make his acquaintance in your dream?"

"Yes; and then we went to supper."

"And you really eat in your dream?"

"Yes."

"I never heard of such a thing. People always wake up when dreaming of a meal; yes, they awake hungry. And what then?"

"I told the man about the robbery."

"And what did he say?"

"He looked very much surprised, and tried to fool me, but I wouldn't have it. I told him I must have the goods."

"The woman did not even change color."

"And what did he say in your dream?"

"He passed them over."

"And then you did wake up?"

"No."

"What did you dream then?"

"I dreamed I'd go and meet the woman."

"The woman did not show the least sign of trepidation."

"And you met her?"

"Yes."

"What then?"

"I woke up."

"Well, well! how remarkable! But now, how about the message to me?"

"I have told you the message in my dream."

The effect of the detective's last words was not what he thought it would be, even though he knew the woman could anticipate his purpose. She did not exhibit any excessive excitement, but merely remarked, in a quiet tone:

"It was a remarkable dream. But dreams are dreams."

"Yes."

"We have nothing to show for them."

"As a rule, nothing. In my case, it is different. My dream, as your say, was a very remarkable one. I have something to show."

"You imagine you have something to show for your dream?"

"Yes."

"Really, I'd like to see what you have?"

Dick produced the recovered articles. The woman looked at them without exhibiting the quiver of a muscle of her face.

"Madame, this farce has gone far enough."

"That is what I think."

"Do you understand what my dream means?"

"Not at all. You are a very strange man. You talk like one who is under a delusion of some kind."

"To put it in words: I did not dream."

"What an imagination you must have to make up such a wonderful story! You should be a romancer. You would make a success."

"I was an eye-witness of the robbery."

"In your dream?"

"No; I really saw you rob that young man."

"Why don't you go and lodge a complaint against me?"

"There are reasons why I will not at present."

"Dear me! I am sorry."

"Why?"

"I'd prove what a fool you are by the young man who was robbed. He'd swear I was not the robber."

"And I swear you are."

"Whose oath would stand? The young man would not perjure himself, and he could not swear I was the robber. But as this has become a real adventure, will you tell me what became of the man?"

"Oh! he's wandering around disconsolate."

"Have you any further business with me?"

"Will you confess to the robbery?"

"No; and what is more, you had better be very careful. You may get into trouble."

"I will chance that."

"You can identify the young man whom you say was robbed?"

"I can."

"And you think I am the robber?"

"I do."

"I will go with you and meet the young man. He shall see my face. He shall study me well, and if he says I am the robber, you will be justified and I will confess."

A light began to dawn on the detective's mind. He realized that the woman had been more skillful than he had dreamed. He felt satisfied she knew the young man, for reasons, would not identify her, and would rather stand his loss, or she had worked under a cover that would defy identification.

"We will not bother about the identification."

"Why not?"

"I want to talk about another matter. I may be your friend."

"You are very kind to volunteer friendship; but I look on you as a meddlesome fool. I do not seek your friendship, nor fear you. I do not know what your scheme is, but as for me, you can do your worst. I can give an account of myself to any judge in the land. I fear no court nor no man. I only offered to stand identification in order to prove what a fool you are."

"One word from me, and two detectives from San Francisco will be on your track."

"Go and speak the word; or, I will go with you and meet them, and again prove you a fool."

Dick was taken a little aback. She had wonderful nerve.

"Come, we will talk matters over."

"I don't know why I waste so much time with you."

"Your nerve is great; but, Louise, you are in my power."

"Well, that is pleasant news. What will you do with me?"

"I desire to come to an understanding with you."

"Are you making love to me?"

"No doubt you are very lovable as far as beauty is concerned."

"Thank you for your sneering allusion to my unfortunate lack of comeliness."

"Bah! you do not deceive me. A sponge would open up a different face."

"Take a sponge and try. You are welcome to make the attempt."

"What nonsense this all is!"

"You are right, sir; it is nonsense. And now let me tell you something: you have made a grave mistake."

"We will see," was the detective's rejoinder.

CHAPTER X.

Dick was at fault. The woman had baffled him. He had the bearings on her, however, and also on the man Arthur Fleet. He felt that it was necessary for him, considering the ultimate object he had in view, to go slow. He determined to let the woman go her way and attempt to run her down to her house.

"I will see you at some future time," he said.

"You are very kind. You are real smart; but let me give you a little advice: you had better mind your own business; you may run against a snag or stone wall. Alecks like you sometimes do."

"I'll heed your advice and not run against a stone wall."

"I suppose I can go?"

"Certainly."

"Will you pay the man?"

"Certainly."

"Good-night."

The woman rose and left without a word. Dick tossed the old man a dollar, but he ran forward and said:

"Five dollars."

"For what?"

"That woman owes me five dollars. You promised her you would pay it. I heard you."

Dick tumbled to the game. The old man was seeking to delay him. He moved toward the door. The old man sprung forward and seized him, and an instant later our hero found himself struggling with a fellow of marvelous strength. Dick, however, was a good 'un, as the professionals have it, and soon downed the old fellow and tossed him under a table. He then dashed from the place. Once in the street, he worked a change, and he started to find the woman, or, rather, get on her track. He had lost her, however. She had disappeared like a bird in the woods, and he muttered:

"That was well done; she is a remarkable woman; but I will run her down yet. I'll get the bulge on her and bring her to terms, and the short cut may be to follow her friend, Arthur Fleet."

Dick returned to his home. He was very much perplexed, and it came to his mind that, after all, the wonderful woman was not Louise Webster, and that he was on the wrong track as far as that case was concerned. He determined to see Billy Benson and make some inquiries.

On the following day the detective lay around the hotel from which the young man had passed out to be robbed on the previous night, and in time his shadow was rewarded. He saw the young man. Our hero had examined the watch and wallet, and saw a name on each, and the name was Wilbur Sedgely. He was a rather fine-looking young fellow. The detective watched for an opportunity and approached him, and he saluted him:

"Halloo, Sedgely!"

The young man stared in surprise, and said:

"You have the advantage of me."

"Certainly; you never saw me before."

"And you are very familiar."

"Well, yes; I have business with you."

"I do not see what it can be; but go ahead."

"Let's sit down here."

The young man was cool. It was evident he was no fool, and that he was a young man of nerve.

The two sat down, and Dick said:

"You had hard luck last night. You were robbed."

The young man laughed, and said:

"Old man, now I know you've made a mistake. I thought so from the start."

"I haven't made a mistake."

"You have; and you will excuse me."

"You need not fear me, young fellow."

"I don't fear any one," said the young man, coloring.

"Then why do you deny that you were robbed?"

"If I were, it would be my own business."

"You were robbed by a woman, and she knocked you down."

"It's false."

"And you think I've made a mistake?"

"Yes."

"It is possible. Are you Wilbur Sedgely?"

"That is my name."

"Show me your watch, and I will admit I've made a mistake."

The young man drew a watch from his pocket, and the detective smiled, and said:

"That's good. You've got me. I see I must give the affair away to the papers, and advertise for the real Wilbur Sedgely."

The young man turned pale and trembled.

"See here," he said, "you are after a reward?"

"Eh?"

"There was a friend of mine robbed."

"Ah!"

"He doesn't want anything said about it. If you have recovered anything, I will reward you and call it square, and ask no questions."

"It's the questions I want, not a reward; so come, Wilbur, let's talk out fair and square. Are you really Wilbur Sedgely?"

"Yes; but I have a cousin of the same name."

"Well, it was not your cousin who was robbed. You were the victim. But you need not fear an exposure if you will own up."

"Are you a thief or a cop?"

"I am not a thief."

"Are you a friend of the woman?"

"No."

"Who are you? What are you?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I am an officer."

"Was the woman arrested?"

"No."

"The thing will not come out, will it?"

"Ah! you own up, then?"

"Yes, I do," was the answer.

"Now we can get down to business," said Dick.

The detective pulled the watch, the diamonds, and the wallet from his pocket, and he said:

"These are yours?"

"Yes. How did you come into possession of them?"

"That is a professional secret."

"I am in a hole," said the young man.

"You are?"

"I am to be used as a witness."

"Why not?"

"Not for a million dollars."

"But why?"

"The whole story would come out. I am innocent; but no one would believe my story."

"Let's get on to this thing."

"No; we will say no more; but if you use me as a witness, I will repudiate the whole thing, no matter how you swear."

"Suppose the woman confesses?"

"I will prove it a conspiracy."

The detective smiled, and said:

"It is possible the affair may not come out."

"Let me know who you are."

"I does not make any difference. If you will make a clean breast of the whole business, I will promise that the affair shall never become public."

"How do I know I can trust you?"

"Here. I return all your property. I ask no reward."

"That is enough."

"Now, let's hear it all."

"I am to be married to one of the best-known young ladies in New York."

"Ah! and you were fooling around with a bad woman."

"That is not true. The woman waylaid me; made me believe she was a married woman; told me her husband was my friend. She met me once before last night. She promised, when we next met, to tell me the name of her husband. She said I could save her and her husband from a great sorrow. I was fooled, she was so pretty and seemed so innocent."

"She was a pretty woman, eh?" and the detective gave a start.

"She had a wonderfully handsome face, her manners were soft and gentle; she seemed innocent and in great trouble."

A world of conjecture ran through the detective's mind, and his his old suspicions returned.

"She was so beautiful and young, eh?"

"She appeared to be not more than two-and-twenty."

"Great Scott!" was the mental ejaculation of our hero. "And you meant no harm?"

"No; but can I make that appear, if it comes out?"

"It will not come out."

"If it does, I am ruined. The family into which I am to marry would repudiate me at once, although I am richer in money than my bride that is to be."

"The affair will never come out. You say this fair thief is not more than two-and-twenty?"

"I should say she was not a day older."

"And she is soft and gentle in her manners?"

"Yes; and has a wonderfully musical voice. I was charmed by her; but only intended to aid her if I could."

"When did you first suspect that she was a bad woman?"

"She seized my hand and squeezed it in a way that aroused my suspicions, and then, when I resented, like a flash it came over me that I was being played by a fraud, and I sprung away from her, and she downed me with an eel-skin. She took me unawares."

"I believe your story, young man."

"Thank you. But how did you recover the articles?"

"I was a witness of the scene."

"But how did you recover the articles?"

"I followed her."

"She is really a thief?"

"I am not certain. She is under the control of a male villain."

"Aha, I see."

"She surrendered the stolen articles to him."

"Then how did you get the articles?"

"Oh, I made him hand them over to me."

"Do you know the woman?"

"I've talked with her. You say you only saw her once before she robbed you?"

"Yes."

"Under what circumstances did she meet you?"

"She must have waylaid me. I met her one night. She called me by name, and requested a few words with me."

"Let me ask you one question. Do you know a man named Arthur Fleet?"

"I know him very slightly. He appears to have plenty of money, and is somewhat of a sport."

"Where did you first meet him?"

"In a billiard-room. He is a fine player."

"Did you ever tell him your affairs?"

"No; but he could have learned all about me from others."

"Can you keep a secret?"

"I can."

The detective was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"Fleet is the man who received the stolen goods."

CHAPTER XI.

As intimated, the story of the young man Wilbur Sedgely had revived all the suspicions of the detective concerning the real identity of the woman-thief, and at the moment he little dreamed of all the complications this suspicion was to lead to. He was sorry to have his suspicions confirmed, but the statement concerning the beautiful face, the musical voice, and the soft and gentle manners were proofs most damning. When the detective said that Fleet was the man from whom he had recovered the goods, the young man Sedgely said:

"I am not surprised. I never liked the man. I thought he was some sort of a fraud."

"Did he ever borrow from you?"

"No; but he tried several times to get me to go with him and buck the tiger."

"And you refused?"

"Yes; I am an old New Yorker. I know too much for that; I do not want to make money that way; I have money enough."

"Now tell me, when you meet Fleet again, what will you do?"

"Shake him."

"You must not do that."

"I can not keep up an acquaintance with a villain—a man whom I know to be a villain."

"You must."

"I am sorry, but I can not do it."

"You forget you're in my power; I can blow this thing."

"Will you?"

"Never, if you will carry out my wishes."

"But I run a risk by associating with a scoundrel."

"I will protect you."

"What do you want me to do?"

"You can go on just as you did before. You need not be intimate, nor need you shake him. It would be dangerous to you."

"How?"

"He would know you were on to his real character, and then he might plot against you—indeed, blackmail you—and force you, in self-defense, to open up the whole business."

"There is something in that. But what is your purpose?"

"I want to find out something about the woman. There is a mystery connected with her and with that man."

"I do not wish to be drawn into the affair, whatever it is."

"Merely go on with your acquaintance with him. You need not become intimate; but I do not want him to suspect that you associate him with the fair thief."

"I will do as you say. But I should know who you are."

"You shall, some day; and I will see you again in a day or two, and we will talk matters over. You need have no fear; no one is on to these people but myself."

"You are a professional detective?"

"I am."

"Then you are entitled to a reward for the return of my valuables."

"That's all right. You may do me a service that will reward me ten times over."

"As long as I can serve you without becoming mixed up in this affair, I will do it."

"I do not want that you should become mixed up in the affair. I want to manage it secretly, and keep everything under cover."

"Then I will do all I can."

"Now, remember, you must be very careful how you act with the man Fleet."

"I will. But look: there he is now."

Our hero was under cover, and did not fear meeting Fleet.

"Will he know you?" asked Sedgeley.

"No."

"Will you meet him?"

"If he seeks you—yes; introduce me."

"Under what name?"

"As your friend—Mr. Thain."

A moment later the fellow Fleet espied young Sedgeley. He walked over, and in a familiar manner said:

"Halloo, Sedge, old boy."

Sedgeley acknowledged the salutation, and introduced Dick.

The three men engaged in a conventional conversation, and during the talk our hero had a chance for studying the man Fleet under new conditions; and later on the men adjourned to the billiard-room and engaged in a game of billiards. Fleet was jaunty and off-handed. He did not act like a man who had been an accessory to a bold robbery the night previous, or like a man who had been brought to bay and compelled to surrender the swag; nor did he show any signs of trepidation in playing billiards with the man the robbery of whom he had instigated. Our hero mentally muttered:

"That fellow doesn't appear to fear any consequences."

After a time, Sedgeley excused himself and went away, and when an opportunity offered, Fleet inquired:

"Is Sedge an old friend of yours?"

"No; I've only known him a short time."

"I've been lucky lately."

"It's been against me."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; and I haven't a great deal to lose. I could not stand another rip. I don't get an allowance for some weeks yet."

"You are not a New Yorker?"

"No; from San Francisco."

"Give us your hand. I am from California."

"Let's go and have something to eat."

The two men entered the hotel restaurant, and when seated at a table, our hero said:

"How long have you been away from home?"

"About a year," and Fleet hesitated and stammered.

Dick observed the hesitation, and watched closely.

"You heard about the Belden case?"

There came a peculiar look in Fleet's eyes, and he said:

"What do you mean about the Belden case?"

"The robbery."

"It's all news to me."

"They say the gal who did the robbery is in New York."

"I haven't heard anything about it."

"I'd like to meet her."

"Who?"

"The gal, Louise Belden."

"Why?"

"I can give her some points. I want to see the gal get away. I believe she only took her own."

"Tell me about the case."

Fleet spoke in the most innocent manner, and our hero mentally concluded again:

"He plays it well."

Dick proceeded and pretended to tell the story. He did not tell it correctly. He said:

"The girl was the step-daughter of old Belden."

"No; only his ward," corrected Fleet.

"Eh, I thought you knew nothing about the case?"

"Since you've been talking I've recalled the fact that I had heard about it."

Fleet had walked into the trap, and our hero was convinced that he was really on the right track.

"Then if you've heard about it, there is no use in my repeating the narrative?"

"I know very little about it, and I would like to get on to the full particulars."

"I reckon you know as much about it as I do. All I know is what I've heard and read about it. I only remember that the girl was old Belden's ward. Did you ever know old Belden?"

"Never."

"He had his niece living with him—a widow?"

"She was his daughter."

"Well, there it goes again. I've got the thing mixed, and you know all about it."

"Between you and me, it is only those two circumstances that I recall. The girl was his ward; the widow was his daughter."

"Where you in San Francisco when it occurred?"

"No."

"I see by the late papers that they have a clew to the girl's whereabouts."

"They have?" exclaimed Fleet starting. "Where do they say she is?"

"In Buffalo."

"Well, that's a small place; they should be able to run her down there."

"I think they will."

"You appear to be interested in the case. Did you ever know any of the parties?"

"No; but I can give the gal some points."

"What can you give her?" Fleet asked, carelessly.

"Oh, I can only open up to her."

"She may come on to New York," said Fleet.

"I think she is too smart; she has advisers."

"Yours is a natural supposition," was Fleet's reply.

CHAPTER XII.

Our hero did not go with Fleet to the tiger's den. He made an excuse, and said that upon some future occasion he might try his luck. Our hero had given Sedgeley full instructions, and later that day, when Fleet and Sedgeley met the second time, the former asked:

"Who is your friend Thain?"

"Oh, he is an odd sort of man."

"Quite calculative, I reckon?"

"No; he is as free as air."

"When he ain't broke."

"He's never broke."

"Never broke?" repeated Fleet.

"Why not; he has heaps of money. I'll bet he has a hundred thousand or so to his credit now in some New York bank."

"Is that so? He said he was well-nigh broke."

"That is a way he has of talking. He has heaps of money, and is as free as running water with it. He never stops to think about cost. I'll bet he carries two or three thousand with him all the time."

There came a thoughtful look to the face of Fleet, and a little later he parted from Sedgeley, and the latter remarked:

"I wish I was out of this whole business. There will be a bombshell of a *dénouement* some day, and I will be mixed up in it."

A half-hour subsequent to Fleet's talk with Sedgeley, the man entered an elegant room in a fashionable apartment-house. Reclining on a lounge, reading, was a singularly handsome woman; and we will here state that the man Fleet was a very comely and well-appearing man. As he entered, the woman rose, and said:

"You bring news? What has happened?"

"What makes you think I've brought news?"

"You show it in your face. Did you succeed in disposing of the watch and diamonds?"

"No; not yet."

"Better not carry them around too long."

The woman spoke in a peculiar tone, and there was a singular look in her eyes.

"I will work them off to-morrow."

"How much money was there in the wallet?"

"Only a few dollars."

"You did not meet me last night; you sent a messenger."

"No; I did not."

The woman pretended to turn pale, and muttered:

"That's strange."

"What is strange?" the man demanded.

"I received a message from you, all the same."

The man showed signs of uneasiness, and he asked in an earnest tone:

"Did you really receive a message from me?"

"Yes, I did."

"Libbie, there is indeed something up if that is true. What sort of a message did you receive from me?"

"Why don't you tell me the truth, Arthur?"

"I'll swear I did not send a message to you; I could not."

"Yes, that's it; but you've deceived me, all the same."

"How?"

"You haven't the watch, the diamonds, or the wallet."

The man turned pale, and the woman continued:

"You were followed and compelled to surrender."

"How do you know this, Libbie?"

"I got it in a dream."

"Then you are a good dreamer, for it is true."

"Then why did you deceive me?"

"I did not want to own up just yet."

The woman related the circumstances as they had been told to her in the form of a dream.

"It is all true. Did you really dream it?" said the man.

"No."

The woman told just what had befallen her. The man listened patiently and attentively, and finally said:

"It is strange all round, Libbie. What can the man be up to? He did not arrest me; he did not arrest you. He is on to us for something."

"We were caught dead, and for some reason we are free. I'd like to know what that man's game is."

They talked for a long time, and finally Fleet said:

"I've got a good chance for you now."

With a glitter in her eyes, in a husky voice she said:

"You know what I told you last night."

"But we've lost all we made there, and I am dead broke."

"Some one is on our track. You should know what that means."

"It means nothing. Anyhow, this is a dead-to-rights game I have on hand."

"You must not ask me to run the chance again."

"Why not?"

"I am watched; you are watched."

"Libbie, you wanted to get out of New York?"

"Yes."

"There is a chance now for us to do so. I would have done it at once if it had not been that I was compelled to stand and deliver."

"Have you a suspicion as to what this new peril means?"

"No; but will you try once again, and make it a winner?"

"Yes; I will try once more," came the answer. "Although the risk is so great, although I came very near to arrest, I will try again; and my only reason is your promise to leave New York."

"Why are you so anxious to leave New York?"

"Arthur, you are very stupid at times."

"Oh, we will leave New York—yes, certainly; but it will be from choice."

"Tell me about this new case."

"I have met a young fellow who is as free as air, who carries thousands in his clothes. You can do him as easy as pulling on a glove. You will make a big haul, and then we will skip."

The woman meditated a moment, and then said:

"This is the last time, Arthur, I will try it; and I will do it at great risk, for it seems certain I am being shadowed."

"That was all an accident."

"Did Sedgeley tell you about last night?"

"No; we are safe here. I knew there would be no risk."

"But the man who followed you and forced you to deliver?"

"That is a mystery, I will admit. He may catch me again."

"You will be on your guard this time."

"I will try it."

"When shall I see my new victim?"

"To-night, if possible; and in the meantime I will find out more about him. It will be a sure case this time."

"And we will leave New York?"

"It is only this that induces me to take the chance. Once more, and it is a go, my darling."

One fact was sure: she was completely under the control of Fleet. It was evident he could persuade her to do anything.

Fleet left her, and during the time he was holding the conversation recorded, Dick had held a second talk with Sedgeley. He had expected the man would make inquiries, and had laid his plans to have the fellow arrange a scheme to serve him as Sedgeley had been served. Upon learning Sedgeley's report, our hero lay around and met Fleet, and they took a stroll. Fleet made himself very pleasant and agreeable. The two men seemingly had formed a great liking for each other. They strolled up Fifth Avenue. They saw many very handsome ladies, and finally they met one who, as she passed them, looked very sharply at Dick, and Fleet said:

"Halloo! you've made a mash."

"Yes, in a horn," was Dick's answer.

The latter had hard work to conceal his excitement, for he recognized that the handsome woman who had stared at him was none other than the veiled woman whom he had met twice under remarkable and startling circumstances. The two men finally returned to the hotel. They indulged in a game of billiards, and at length separated.

"Now I will get it," Dick muttered, when alone. "I've been shown up; I've been selected as a victim. The fun will commence."

Dick strolled out to be sacrificed. He expected to meet the beautiful lady; but she did not appear, and it was well on to midnight when he adopted a new disguise, and went to meet the detective from San Francisco, Louis Bragg. Our hero had an appointment with the man, and when they were seated, Bragg asked:

"Well, have you got on to anything?"

"I have nothing to say yet. But did you bring me a copy of that photograph?"

"No; I've not seen Benson."

"The chances are he is on to something."

"I should not be surprised. He is a daisy; but he will report to me."

"You can give me a description of the girl?"

"Yes; I've brought you a written description."

Bragg handed a paper to our hero, who put it in his pocket, and a little later the two men separated. When our detective reached his home, he read over the description, and he exclaimed:

"Well, well! it's wonderful! But I am on to the right track. And now, what shall I do? Shall I hand the affair over to these two men, or work on it myself?"

A long time he meditated, and finally said:

"I will carry through the adventure with the woman: let her try to rob me, and I'll force her to a confession, and then it may be time enough to hand her over to the other fellows."

Next day our hero was on the street. In the meantime, the man Fleet and the woman Libbie had held a consultation. They met in the apartments in the flat, and the man said:

"Well, Libbie, you saw him; what do you think of him?"

"He looks innocent enough, except there was a strange look in his eyes as he gave me back my stare."

"He is as simple as water. Sedgeley is a smart fellow compared to him."

"That may be; but when he looked at me, a cold chill went through my heart."

"What nonsense! You were nervous."

"It may be I was. But I felt the chill, all the same."

"You never did take to this business."

"No; I never did, and I never will; and this is the last time I will attempt it. If I succeed, we will go away; if I fail—well—"

"Well what?"

"I will not tell you now; but for your sake and mine, I hope we will get a good sum, and be able to 'fold our tents, like the Arabs, and as silently steal away.'"

"We will, my darling."

There was a history connected with the woman who was so devoted to Fleet that she was willing to commit a crime to please him.

CHAPTER XIII.

Dick was out to be sacrificed. He had become very bitter. He had met with a great disappointment. Men and women will go long years seemingly unpossessed of a heart, so indifferent are they. Men will meet the most beautiful women, and there will follow no impression, and then suddenly these same men will meet some plain, seemingly unattractive girls and fall madly in love. This experience frequently attends the history of beautiful women.

Dick Velsor had met many beautiful women, and he had been indifferent. Their charms had made no impression upon him. He had but one object in life, and that was to solve the mystery of his own parentage. He gave no thought to beauty and the charms that fix the imagination, until one night he met a veiled woman. He met her under very questionable circumstances, and he became interested in her as he had never been interested before. He parted from her, and his soul seemed to have inshrined her image. Later he met a man who opened up to him the most startling suggestions, and so deep had been the impression made upon him, that in the face of the most convincing evidence, he discerned where she might be innocent. When he met her, and he actually beheld her commit a crime, his excuses and explanations ceased to present themselves; but there still remained a strange interest, and he had only beheld a hideous face. Then later he beheld the face as God had made it. He saw that she was beautiful, and the spell was broken, and it was with a cold-blooded resolution that Dick Velsor started out to let the woman entrap him; but it was his purpose to catch her in her own trap. He had determined to cut short her career as a thief. The spell had been broken. He was a stern officer, bent on doing his duty, where he had been a weak fellow, looking for excuses and explanations.

Our hero kept out of the way of the man Fleet. He had a reason. He held a secret meeting with young Sedgeley, and then he walked the streets; but he did not meet the fair enchantress who was to allure, charm, and rob him. Night came. He had given up all hope of seeing the woman. He was proceeding along, intending to go home, when he came upon a lady who stood leaning against a stoop newel, and she was veiled and appeared to be weeping. Dick fell to the trick at once, and he said:

"Here she is."

Our hero stood near by looking at the fair actress, and he soon became aware that she discerned his presence. She started and moved on with feeble steps, and acted like one lost in deep anguish. Dick followed her, and he knew that she was aware that she was being followed. He determined to keep up the chase. He knew it was what the fair Circe desired, and he wanted her to weave her web to her own mind and method. She turned down a side street and went toward the river. Dick followed, and he was compelled to remark:

"She is playing it well."

The woman went straight toward the river, out on a pier, and Dick followed. He had no fear that she would do anything rash; but he wanted her to have her own sweet way. She reached the end of the pier, then turned suddenly, and appeared to recognize, for the first time, his presence. Our hero advanced, and in a wild tone the woman demanded:

"Why do you follow me?"

"How do you know I follow you?"

"Please leave me to my sorrow and my purpose."

"Your sorrow I can not control; your purpose I can prevent. Come, miss, you appear to be in trouble."

"I am in great trouble," she cried; then, as though she had spoken unguardedly, she said "No; I am not in trouble."

"People do not weep when they are happy."

"I am not weeping."

"No; but you were weeping."

"You speak like a good, true man. I can read kindness and sympathy in your voice. Leave me alone; go away. Indeed, I did weep. I have cause to weep."

"An influence bids me protect you against yourself."

"I will not harm myself."
 "Miss, let me lead you away from here."
 "Where would you take me?"
 "Let me escort you to your home."
 "I am in trouble. My anguish is great."
 "You said I was a true man. Tell me your trouble."
 "Why should I, sir?"
 "I may aid you."
 "Why should you?"
 "Simply as a fellow-being finding one suffering."
 "It is strange that you should have followed me."
 "It is not strange. I saw a woman in trouble; I have instincts."
 I saw you run toward the river. My suspicions were aroused."
 "You are a kind man; you would help me if you could."
 "I am prepared to do so."
 "Mine is a sad story."
 "Would you venture to tell your tale to me?"

Dick realized that he was going through the same old conventional trick. A tale of sorrow is the most effective means of disarming suspicion and affording thieves—female thieves—a chance to work their game.

When our hero asked, "Would you venture to tell your sad tale to me?" there was a lurking satire in his voice. Yet he knew that, while the woman was pretending and in the act of playing a game, that in fact were she to tell her real story it would be a sad one indeed. The woman did not answer him at once, and Dick said:

"You can trust me."
 "But why, sir, should I burden you with my sorrow?"
 "Because it is possible I may help you."
 "You can not aid me."
 "How do you know I can not aid you?"
 "Because it is a question of money, and there human sympathy always ends. The need of giving money, dispels sympathy; it is the ditch where sympathy terminates. People are plentiful and profuse in advice, but when it comes to giving—well, then it is another thing. Now, sir, you are very kind and full of sympathy. I know you would do anything to aid me, save give me money, and that is what I need; but I do not ask for it."

"Why not?"
 "The sum I need would appall the most generous giver."
 "You are quite a philosopher."
 "It is a sum no stranger could possibly give to another."
 "There might be circumstances that would lead me to advance a large sum."

"A hundred dollars would be a large sum."
 "Not for me."
 "Not for you?"
 "I do not count by hundreds; I count by thousands."
 "You are a strange man. Where there are so many who need, how can you be so ready to give and still retain the power to give?"

"I do not give foolishly, nor do I say that I have given. I only say it is within my power to give when I am satisfied that the need is great and the circumstances warrant it."

"I will ask a favor that will cost you nothing."
 "Name it."
 "Go away, and leave me."
 "I know your purpose as well as though at this moment I saw you plunging into those dark waters."
 "If you knew my reason for wishing to be alone, you would go away, and leave me to myself. But it would be useless to tell my tale to you."

"Why?"
 "I know the world. No, no; you would listen, and in your heart declare me guilty."

"Guilty of what?"
 "Of being a thief," came the answer.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE came a new suspicion to our hero's mind. The suggestion came: is it possible that this woman has relented; that she intends to rush from the possibility of crime to death? The detective remembered her words, "I will never do it again!" And yet he remembered how skillfully and how conventionally she had performed the job. It was the old game; the work of an expert. She had robbed Sedgely in the most deft manner; downed him with the skill of a veteran thief; and yet she had said, "I will never do it again!" And now she admitted to him that if she should tell her story, he would not believe her innocent.

"Are you a thief?" asked Dick.
 "I may as well confess that I am. Any one hearing my story would say: 'You are a thief.'"

"Why?"
 "My story is such an improbable one."
 "Will you declare your innocence to me?"

Dick had had time to think, and the conviction returned to him that she was playing a game. She had thrown herself in his way; she had pretended to weep; she had led the way to the dock; she had turned and addressed him; and all these incidents accorded with a set plan.

"Do not question me further," said the woman.

"But I am deeply interested."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Call the police."

The woman recoiled.

"On what pretense would you call the police?"

"To save you against yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"There is a law making it a crime to permit you to carry out your purpose. It is my duty to do so."

"Suppose I leave the pier, then will you go away?"

"I will only leave you when I see you in charge of your friends."

"I have no friends. I am utterly friendless."

"Then you must permit me to act as a friend. What you contemplate is madness. I will not, under any circumstances, permit you to carry out your design."

"Stranger, let me plead with you. Go away. You do not know to what misery, to what a fate you restore me."

"I want you to tell me your story."

"I have told it to a person who should have believed me. When he does not believe in my innocence, no one else will."

"I will."

"Oh, yes, when you hear my story; but when the police have seized me, and the evidence is repeated against me, even you will cry out with all the others: 'She is guilty!'"

"No, I will believe in your innocence. But why should the police seize you?"

"I am already a fugitive, and nothing remains to me but to escape by that broad, open door."

The woman pointed toward the black waters. Her manner was very impressive, her voice dramatic.

"Listen to me," said Dick. "If you tell me your story, and I am convinced of your innocence, I will save you from the police, and will in the end establish your innocence."

"But why should you save me?"

"Because my sympathies are aroused in your interest."

"I am half inclined to tell you my story."

"Yes, trust me," said Dick.

All of Dick's favorable impressions had vanished, and he saw that the woman, with a skill and cunning that was wonderful, was playing him for a dead robbery, and he resolved upon a very singular and indeed very startling plan.

"Mine is a long story," said the woman.

"I can stay and listen to a tale as long as the continued narratives of the 'Arabian Nights,'—especially when the narrative comes from a beautiful narrator."

"How do you know I am beautiful? You have not seen my face."

"I care not to see it, and yet I know you are beautiful."

"It is not like a man not to desire to see a beautiful face."

"I did not say I did not wish to see your face."

"I think you did. Recall your words."

"I remember my words. They were wrong. I was speaking in the sense that it was not necessary for me to see your face to be convinced that you were beautiful."

"I have known of women whose faces were not their fortune but their misfortune. If your conclusion is correct, it is possible that my face has been my misfortune."

"I know you are beautiful."

"What more do you wish?"

"I wish to see your face."

"Then the charm will be broken and your interest in me will cease if I am not beautiful, as you suppose."

"I will still be disposed to aid you."

"Suppose I am hideously homely?"

"I will still be disposed to aid you."

"You are so well satisfied that I am beautiful, you can declare rashly. I am half disposed to let you see how plain my face is, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"Your words had inspired me with a new hope."

"Cultivate and believe in the hope, for I care not how plain your face may be. If you are a sincere woman, I will aid you."

"Money might save me simply because it would give me time to establish my innocence."

"You shall have that time if you are innocent."

"But you will not be so ready to believe me innocent when you see my face."

"I will."

"You tempt me to test you."

"Do so."

The woman was silent a moment, and then said:

"Suppose I show you a comely face, and then—" The woman stopped.

"Well, what then?"

"You seek to betray me?"

Dick stood aghast, and the woman went on, and said:

"Yes, betray me to the police."

"I would not do that now even though you were guilty."

"I am tempted to put you to the test, and break the spell."

"Never."

"And when you see that I am not beautiful, you will still be disposed to aid me?"

"Yes, if convinced that you are sincere, and need aid."

"I will show you my face; I will trust you."

"Thank you."

"Come to the light; take a good look; satisfy yourself how plain I am."

They walked over to the pier light. The woman placed herself directly under its glare, and raising her veil, said:

"There! see how you were mistaken."

It was indeed a beautiful face. Our hero had seen it before; one passing glimpse. At the moment he saw it plainly, and he muttered:

"I was not mistaken; you are indeed beautiful. I knew it."

The woman lowered her veil, and said:

"Do you believe the owner of that face could be a thief?"

"Who could believe it?" was the evasive answer; for the de-

detective knew the woman was a thief, and he knew that at that very moment she was carrying out a plan to commit a daring robbery, and he was to be the victim.

"You are still disposed to befriend me?"

"Why not?"

"Ah! I fear my story will arouse doubts in your mind."

"Tell me the truth, and I will believe you."

"I will. I need help. My strange meeting with you has aroused new hopes in my heart. I do not wish to die; I do not wish to meet disgrace. My innocence can be proved if the right person aids me."

"I am willing to befriend you."

The detective spoke the truth. He realized that the woman was to be pitied; that she was but doing the bidding of one who held her under a control even more powerful than the hypnotic influence.

"And you think you can aid me?"

"I think I can be of service to you."

"Let's sit down here."

The woman stepped away from under the glare of the pier lamp and the string-piece, and our hero took a seat close beside her.

CHAPTER XV.

THE detective sat close to the woman, whom he knew intended to rob him. He wished to give her a good opportunity to do so. When once seated, she commenced to weep, and Dick said, as he laid his arm over her shoulder in a soothing manner:

"Do not weep. You can trust your narrative with me."

The woman appeared to be completely overcome with emotion. She leaned her head upon his shoulder. The position was a novel one for the detective. The woman appeared to be quivering with emotion. Our hero was soothing her, and was fully conscious while doing so that he was being robbed in a most skillful manner. The woman did not take his watch or his diamonds, but she did deftly steal his wallet from his pocket. When the money was transferred, she appeared to recover a little from her emotion; and Dick said:

"There, now; do not fear to tell me all."

"I am an orphan."

"Poor girl!" said Dick in a consoling tone.

"Since I was fifteen I have had to take care of myself."

"How unfortunate," consoled Dick; and in his heart he was sad, while there rested a smile upon his face, the situation was really so peculiar and novel.

"I am a music-teacher, and a year ago a lady employed me to teach her two daughters, and I became a resident of her home. She had a son; that son became enamored with me."

"Why not?"

"Ah! his love led to my ruin."

"He shall marry you," said Dick in a determined tone.

"No—no, you misunderstand me. The mother heard of her son's infatuation, as she called it, and she became my enemy."

"Did she turn you from the house?"

"No. I wish she had. She did worse. She started to cure her son of his infatuation. Some bonds were stolen from the house, and I was accused as the thief."

"Effect you can prove your innocence?"

"I can not."

"Why not?"

"The woman had so arranged the theft, or the pretended theft, that all the circumstances would point toward me as the thief."

"Oh, I see; and the son?"

"Ah! there comes my sorrow. I could stand all else but that the cruel man would not believe my protestations of innocence."

"Theo he never loved you?"

"It seemed to me to be love."

"I believe the boy was in the scheme to make it appear that you were a thief."

"Why should he turn against me?"

"He had tired of his love, or had been led to see that your social position was too far beneath him. He may still love you, but prudence might have suggested to him that it would be better to break off the engagement."

"Then his sense of prudence was stronger than his love. And do you think he still loves me?"

"It is a love so weak you can spare it for some one in a higher social position."

"What good sense you have."

"Thank you. What drove you to this dock?"

"I saw my lover to night and I told him I was innocent. He said he could not see how I was innocent."

"The dog!"

"I appealed to him to save me, innocent or guilty, or at least permit me time to prove my innocence."

"And what did he say?"

"That he could not sympathize with guilt and ingratitude."

"The dog!"

"I was heart-broken. His meanness, however, nerved me to tell him how mean and cruel he was."

"And what did he say?"

"He said he was doing wrong not to summon the police and hand me over into custody. He bid me go, and merely said he hoped I would be able to evade the police and get away."

"And now what will you do?"

"I do not know what I shall do."

"You will not seek to take your own life?"

"Do you believe in my innocence?"

"Believe in your innocence—believe that you did not steal those bonds? I'd strike your accuser to the earth!"

"Then you will aid me?"

"Have you a place where you will be safe for a few days?"

"Yes," was the answer.

The woman had Dick's pocket-book, and he knew she was anxious to get away. He desired to give her an opportunity, for he intended playing a very deep game.

"How can I communicate with you?"

"I can meet you."

"When and where?"

"You shall name time and place."

"Do you need money for your immediate wants?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the woman, in an agitated tone as she grasped our hero's hand, as he raised it toward his pocket, as though to secure his wallet.

Dick smiled. He enjoyed the woman's quickness.

"But you do need money?"

"Yes: enough to replace the amount I am accused of stealing."

"Why should you replace what you did not steal?"

"I am so worried and nervous."

"Can you meet me without risk to-morrow night in front of the Hotel, at nine o'clock?"

"Yes."

"We will meet, then."

Dick rose to his feet, and so did the woman. With alacrity they walked from the pier, and once on the street, she said:

"You had better leave me now."

"Why?"

"Our being together may attract attention."

"But will not your traveling alone be more likely to attract attention?"

"No; I can take care of myself."

"And you will meet me to-morrow night without fail?"

"Yes."

"Then I will say good-night."

"Good-night," said the woman, quickly.

Dick walked away. He came to an alley-way, darted in, and worked one of his magical changes. He had appeared as young Thain, but when the change was made he was the man who on a previous occasion had held a long talk with a veiled woman in a saloon. Having worked his change, he started forth. He knew the city well where he found himself. He had selected the spot as a good one for bidding the woman good-night. With his purpose in view, he knew just the route she would be compelled to take, and he knew how, after his transform, he could scud around, and come upon her. He moved very rapidly, and was soon on the woman's track, and, with a purpose in view, he permitted her to discover that he was shadowing her. The woman was on the alert, and she soon did discover that she was being shadowed. She made several turns, and attempted to throw off the shadower; but he always bobbed up on her track, and she muttered:

"This is really unfortunate. Who can that man be? I will let him come up to me. I will find out who he is."

The woman was fearless as far as personal danger was concerned, so, after one or two efforts to throw the shadower off her track, she slowed up and permitted him to come close to her, and as he approached, she said:

"How dare you follow me?"

She had stopped at a point where it was quite dark.

The man laughed.

"You may think it a good joke, my friend; but you will learn that you make a sad mistake."

"Oh, you know me, madame?"

Dick stepped closer, and as she fixed her eyes on him she recognized him. A low cry of astonishment and consternation burst from her lips.

"You are the man!"

"I am the man."

The woman had given herself away. She forgot for the moment that, although she recognized the man, there was no reason why he should recognize her. She was quick, however, and said:

"Tom, this will not do."

Dick admired her quickness and cuteness, and he said:

"I thought I'd like to have a little chat with you."

"It will not do, Tom. I've told you a hundred times you must not follow me so, and I will be compelled to summon the police."

"I have a message for you," said Dick.

The woman saw that she had been fully recognized, but she determined to face it out if she could.

"You're fooling me, Tom."

"But you can't fool me," said Dick.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean, madame."

"Will you please explain what you mean, Tom?"

"Tom is played out. I know you, and you recognize me, and that is all there is of it."

"Who are you?"

"I delivered you a message the other night."

"You did? You are laboring under a mistake."

"Oh, no."

"And you say you have a message for me?"

"That is what I say."

"And I say you made a mistake."

"No, I have not made a mistake, and I can convince you."

"Do so."

"Madame, I have dreamed again."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE woman trembled like an aspen leaf. Dick could see her emotion, so violent was its exhibition. The woman looked around in a furtive manner, and our hero said:

"You can not escape; you can not down me, so you may as well take it easy. I know you."

"Come here," she said.

The woman stepped under a lamp, raised her veil, and declared: "You see now you are mistaken. You never saw me before. You had better go away, or I will scream for assistance."

"Oh, no, you will not scream for assistance."

"How dare you address me?"

"You know well enough why I dare address you. I tell you I have dreamed again."

The woman was silent. She fully realized that the change from her disguise did not serve as a blind.

"You robbed a man to-night. I saw you rob him."

"It's false."

"That is all right. Come, we will go to the station; you shall be searched, and if the stolen property is not found on you, then I will own up I am mistaken."

"Dare you suggest that you will arrest me?"

"Certainly."

"You have no warrant."

"I do not need one. I saw you commit the robbery."

The woman appeared to realize that she was fairly caught, and she said:

"Who are you, and why do you pursue me?"

"I might ask you, why do you go around robbing people?"

"Oh, what shall I do?" exclaimed the woman. "Why do you pursue me?"

"Is it not my duty to follow criminals?"

"You are an officer?"

"Have you not guessed that before?"

"Have mercy on me and do not arrest me."

"I will not arrest you."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Make a full confession."

"I will, and restore the stolen money."

"Who instigated you to commit the robbery?"

"Why do you ask that question?"

"Because I know you are not a thief at heart."

The woman did not answer, but the detective could see that she was laboring under great emotion.

"Come; tell me all."

"I have confessed."

"You do not look like a thief, you do not commit these robberies at your own suggestion. Now tell me, who urges you on?"

"You know."

"We will admit that I know the person who urges you on. Now, what is his power over you?"

"Do not press me for an answer."

"I must have an answer."

"Oh, be kind! Ask me no more. Let me go, and I promise never to attempt a robbery again."

"That will not do. What is your name?"

"Libbie Fleet," came the answer.

"Then the man Arthur Fleet is your husband?"

"He is."

"What was your name before you became his wife?"

"What does it matter?"

"A great deal. I know more of you than you suppose. Now, admit to me that your name was Louise Webster or Belden."

"No, my name was not Louise Webster nor Belden."

"Why persist in deceiving me. I know your name was Louise Webster. You may as well confess it at once."

"I swear my name before I was married was not Louise Webster nor Belden."

"You may as well own up."

"I am telling you the truth. Let me go and I will leave New York, desert my present mode of life, and earn an honest living."

"What was your name?"

"Libbie Cooper."

"Will you tell me your story?"

"I dare not."

"I am disposed to be merciful if you will permit me."

"Oh, what shall I do?"

"Tell me the truth."

"You would not believe me."

"Yes, I will believe you if you tell me the truth."

"Please let me go away."

"And your husband will urge you on to another crime. Sooner or later you will be arrested and punished."

"I know, and I will never rob again."

"How is it you ever became a thief?"

"I was born a thief."

The detective gave a start.

"What nonsense!"

"Yes, I was born a thief. My father was a thief."

"You are deceiving me. I know your history."

"Then if you know my history, you can well be merciful," came the answer.

There was something in the tone and manner of the woman that impressed the detective. He was a little at sea. She spoke in a weary way, and there was sadness in the tones of her voice.

"Shall I tell you your history?" said the detective. "Your name was Louise Webster. You were a ward of Mr. Belden, who lived in California. It is not necessary for me to tell you the rest. You know it all. And now tell me, is Fleet responsible for all the crimes you have committed?"

"No; he is not responsible."

"What did you do with the bonds?"

"Do not ask me now."

The woman had made an admission.

"Now is as good a time as any."

"I must have time to think."

"You know what you did with the fruits of that robbery?"

"No matter what I did with the bonds, the money is all gone."

"You gave everything to Fleet, who instigated the robbery?"

"Yes."

"Will you return the wallet you stole?"

The woman handed over the wallet, and said:

"I have made restitution. You will not arrest me?"

"No."

Dick was becoming strangely interested in the woman. He was a very sympathetic man. She had said she wanted time to think, so did he wait time to think; and he remarked:

"You are weary?"

"Yes. I wish you had let me leap off the dock."

"Did you really intend to leap off the dock?"

"I was resolved to do so."

One fact had escaped our hero's mind which he afterward recalled:

"I want to have a long, confidential talk with you."

"When?"

"Will you meet me to-morrow night? You need not fear."

"I will."

"You will not tell Fleet of the meeting?"

"No."

"If you meet me, it will be to your advantage."

"I will meet you."

The detective named time and place, and said:

"If you do not meet me, I will become your foe. You can not hide from me. You can not escape from me by going away."

"I will meet you. Can I go now?"

"Yes, you can go now."

The woman walked away, and Dick worked another quick and magical change, and started to follow her; but, to his surprise and wonderment, she vanished as though she had been caught up in a cloud.

"Well, that beats me!" he muttered. "And it's all right. She will meet me. She dare not do otherwise."

The detective went to his home, and Libbie Fleet soon appeared at the flat where she resided with her husband. She had an apartment in a low quarter in the vicinity where our hero had first started to shadow her; and when she contemplated a robbery she took up her abode in the low apartment, and then for months she would lead an outwardly reputable life in the flat. Fleet, meantime, passed among his friends as a single man. After her interview with the detective succeeding the robbery on the pier, she appeared in the flat. Fleet was at home awaiting her return.

"Did you succeed?" he asked.

"I succeeded, but later I encountered a most singular adventure. The man who followed you and recovered the stolen goods on that night I robbed Sedgely met me again to-night, and he took away the fruits of my robbery."

"Libbie," said the man, "you have done well. It is all right. I've made a hit; I have money. We will leave New York."

The woman related to her husband all that had occurred.

"He is after you for some other affair."

"So it would seem."

"Well, we will leave these parts for a year or two. I reckon New York is becoming too hot a place for us."

"Where do you really mean to go?"

"West."

"That man is like a shadow on my track."

"We will give him the slip."

Meantime our hero returned to his lodgings, and he was very thoughtful. He did not retire to bed, but sat thinking over the occurrences of the night.

"I do not know what to make of it," he muttered. "I am all at sea. That woman owned up too readily. There is a mystery back of all this, after all. I will see her to-morrow, and I will know just what it all means."

The more Dick meditated on the matter the more perplexed he became, and he muttered again:

"She had a purpose in owning up so readily. I would not have let her go if I had thought she could dodge me so easily. She is a keen one."

On the day following Dick sought the man Fleet. He did not see him. Later he met Sedgely, and he had not seen Fleet.

"I've been a fool," thought Dick. "I've given her the cue and she has skipped."

Night came, and he went to the place where he was to meet the woman. She did not appear; he did not expect that she would.

"I have acted like a fool," he muttered.

He remained in the neighborhood a long time, then concluded that she had eluded him. He had determined to go away, when he saw an elderly lady standing a little way off and watching him intently. He stood at the moment in the full glare of the light which flashed from a saloon window. He fell to the fact that she was watching him, and he muttered:

"Aha! she is working my own game."

CHAPTER XVII.

A CERTAIN suspicion flashed through our hero's mind. He felt sure that Libbie Fleet had thought she could go under a disguise and shadow him, and such a shadow meant mischief. He had been the woman's *belé noir*, and it was natural that she should seek to turn on him; but he smiled as he thought of the flimsy disguise. She must have underrated his ability when she imagined that she could play him while working under such a cover.

"I'll give her a chance," he said. "I'll do more; I'll humor her and let her think I am deceived. I'll let her think she is

working her game nicely, and then I'll open up on her like a flash."

The detective smiled in a complaisant manner, he walked slowly away. The woman followed him. He acted to indicate that he was not conscious of being followed. He went to a neighborhood where he could carry out the plan he had in his mind. The old woman kept upon his track.

"She wants to run me down to my abode," he muttered, and he added "This is rich, you bet."

He finally arrived at the point where he thought it a good chance to have a chat with the old shadower. He came to a sudden halt. The woman also halted, when he turned and approached her.

"Good-evening, madame," he said.

The woman did not attempt to play points on him as far as entering into a conversation was concerned, indeed, it appeared to be just what she desired. She answered him:

"Good-evening."

"Madame, why have you been dogging my steps?"

"I thought you might give me a chance to talk with you."

"You have that chance now."

"Can we go somewhere to some public place where we can sit down and talk?"

"It is a singular proposition, madame."

"I know it, but my reasons are very singular also."

There was a ladies and gentlemen's restaurant at hand; indeed, he had selected the place for the opening up with the veiled woman.

"Here is a place. Shall we go in?"

"Yes; but I only want you to order a cup of coffee. I will pay."

"You are very kind; but a cup of coffee will suit me, and I will let it be your treat."

They entered the place and sat down at a table, and the old woman said:

"I propose to ask you some very singular questions."

The detective smiled, and said:

"In fair play, I should see your face."

"You shall."

The old lady raised her veil and showed a pleasant face. She did not attempt to lower her veil again. She tossed it over her hat and sat opposite Dick, with her face fully revealed.

The detective was staggered. He had expected to pierce a clumsy disguise; he expected but an instant's glimpse of the face at best, and her freedom in showing her features surprised him; and what was more, he could not detect a disguise. He was gazing upon the face of an old woman. He was taken all aback.

"I do not think you ever saw me before."

"No, I can not say I ever saw you before."

"You must certainly be surprised that an old lady like me should seek you out, follow you, and seek an interview. I had a reason."

"No doubt."

"My questions will appear a greater mystery."

"No doubt."

Dick still believed the woman was Libbie Fleet under a disguise, and he was amazed at the skill she had displayed in working her disguise, and her talent in carrying out the rôle of an old lady. He was studying her face, seeking for some betrayal of the fact of disguise, and yet he was baffled. The coffee was ordered; the old lady sipped her drink and fixed her eyes on Dick. The latter stood the scrutiny, and finally said:

"You intended to ask me some questions?"

"What is your name?"

"Excuse me, but you admit you followed me?"

"Yes."

"You would not do so unless you knew my identity?"

"This is no romance. I am not enamored with you."

"Thank you."

"As I said, this is no romance. There is a mystery in your life. You are not what you seem. You have a history—a strange history. And now tell me, what is your name?"

"Madame, you are making fun of me."

"I am not, and let me ask you, are you a criminal?"

Dick stared. He had hoped to be the questioner. He was being cross-examined in a most singular and remarkable manner.

"Come," said the old woman, "tell me your name."

"Why do you ask it?"

"Simply because it may be a cue for other questions. It may be a key to the mystery I am seeking to solve."

Dick had expected to carry the war into Spain. The old woman was carrying it into Africa.

"You appear to have a great interest in me?"

"Yes; at present. Later I may lose it. The occasion of my interest may be accidental or well-founded. I can not tell yet."

Dick thought he would try a little invasion, and he said:

"I know you, madame—I know you well."

The old lady laughed, and said, quickly:

"So much the better. You have the advantage of me; but it may serve my purpose better if you know who I am. There is no good reason why you should not answer my questions."

"I have long loved you in secret," said Dick.

"Well, well! that is delightful to hear. It is very pleasant; and had you told me that forty years ago, I might have been delighted. It would have meant something; but it can mean nothing now."

"I am old enough to marry."

Again the old woman laughed, and said:

"You are old enough to marry, no doubt; and I—well, I am too old to marry."

The old lady fixed her keen eyes on Dick. There was no attempt at disguise. Our hero did not know what to make of it.

"We are talking nonsense," remarked the old lady.

"Yes; it is all nonsense. It is indeed quite a joke you are having at my expense."

"I am not having a joke. I am serious. Now tell me your name."

"My name is Thain."

"Thain?" repeated the old lady. "What are the initials?"

As the old woman asked the question, her eyes were bright with keen interest.

"My name is Robert Thain."

Twice in slow tones the old lady repeated the name, and finally she said:

"That is really your name?"

"That is my name," Dick answered.

The old woman appeared for some minutes lost in meditation; her silence was so prolonged the situation became awkward.

"Then I will again ask, is Thain your real name?"

"You can be assured it is my real name."

"But you really do not know where you were born? Do you remember your father and mother?"

"Oh, come off!" said Dick.

Our hero was getting tired. He thought the skillful Libbie had carried her little business, or her joke, far enough.

"Why do you not answer my questions?"

"I would believe you were an old lunatic if I did not know better."

"I am glad you know better."

"I do know better. And now, Libbie, this is all nonsense. What is your scheme? You were to tell me something."

"I want to tell you something; I long to tell you something; but you do not give me the chance."

"What chance do you want?"

"I want you to answer my questions. Come, now, is there not a mystery in your life?"

"Libbie, let me tell you your disguise doesn't work. I went under the cover at the first glance."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Let's stop fooling," said the old lady.

"Agreed."

"There is a mystery in your life. You have a history."

This remark, or statement, did not excite Dick, because he was fully convinced that the woman was working a game.

"I have no time to spare."

"We will meet again?"

"Possibly, yes. But you have not kept your word. You promised to tell me something to-night."

"I will tell you at some future time."

"As you wish."

They rose from the table. The old lady drew a purse from her pocket, intending to settle for the coffee; but Dick interposed, and said:

"I will settle."

"As you please."

"Good-night," said Dick, as they left the restaurant.

"Good night," the old lady responded.

Dick went one way, the old lady the other.

"Now it's my turn," muttered our hero, taking advantage of his opportunity and working one of his wonderful and magical transforms, and immediately he turned to follow the old woman. He saw her walking quite leisurely down the street.

"Well, this gets me!" he muttered.

He followed until the old lady turned from the main thoroughfare. He waited until they came to a deserted locality, when he made a *détour*, and came and met the veiled woman. He stepped right up, and said:

"Well met."

The old woman was perfectly cool, and said:

"You have made a mistake. You had better march off about your business."

As she spoke she stepped under a street lamp, and threw up her veil. The detective laughed, and said:

"That's all right, Libbie; but it won't do with me."

"I don't understand you," said the old lady.

"Go to the station-house with me, and understand better."

"All right. I will go with you to the station-house if you dare announce yourself an officer."

"You are well got up."

"I do not know what you mean. It would appear that you are laboring under a great blunder."

"You are masquerading under a disguise."

"You can prove by a close study that you are mistaken?"

"Certainly."

"Satisfy yourself. I will let you prove yourself a fool."

"You will not be offended?"

"Certainly not. You appear to have made a blunder. I am willing to let you satisfy yourself."

Dick advanced, and ran his hand on the woman's head under her hat. She appeared to possess long gray hair, and in a moment he knew that she wore no wig; that she was not disguised, and that indeed he had been talking to an old woman whom he had never seen before. He was a surprised man.

"Are you satisfied?" demanded the old lady.

"I have made a mistake."

"Now explain how you came to make such a blunder?"

"I am an officer on the lay for a female thief who sometimes assumes the disguise of an old lady."

"Ah! I see."

Dick did not dare disclose the fact that he was the same person whom the strange old lady had interviewed. He intended to meet her again. He intended to learn the purpose of her interview.

OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

VOL. 2. CLEVELAND, U.S.A., JAN. 21, 1910. No. 82.

A publication devoted to high-class detective literature. Published every Friday, by The Arthur Westbrook Company, 1544 Third Street, N. W., Cleveland, U. S. A.

Application for entry as second-class matter at the post-office at Cleveland, O., pending.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE.

Per Year	\$2.50
Six Months	1.25
Three Months65

Postage paid to all parts of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, the Canal Zone, Hawaii and the Philippines. Stamps accepted the same as money. Address letter to

The Arthur Westbrook Company, Cleveland, U. S. A.

GREAT QUAKES.

UPHEAVALS THAT HAVE SHAKEN THE WORLD'S FOUNDATIONS.

The terrible doom of Messina, a town famous for other reasons besides being the scene of one of Shakespeare's most beautiful comedies, is another reminder that the peoples of the world are ever at the mercy of the earth. Messina was a lovely city, containing cathedral, university, palaces, museums, factories, and all the other paraphernalia of a modern city. One night the inhabitants went to bed happy; within a few hours Messina had ceased to exist. Wiped out with a suddenness that appals the mind, the Sicilian town is to-day merely a name—another addition to the long list of national calamities.

THE 'FRISCO SCARE.

One need not go back to the destruction of Lisbon in 1755 to find out what an earthquake means. Within the last ten years there have been a score, excluding Messina, involving the loss of over 140,000 lives. Perhaps the one which excited most fears was the destruction of San Francisco. It was no use pointing out that the city by the sea was peculiarly liable to these visitations, thousands of persons got the impression that the end of San Francisco was the beginning of the end of the world, and at least two new creeds were founded upon this world calamity.

The disaster was most dramatic, occurring in the height of the season. The local theaters were vying with each other for the patronage of the people, and one manager had engaged an opera company, including Signor Caruso, as his chief attraction.

And it is a coincidence that the great singer should have been within a comparatively short distance of Messina when its turn came. At San Francisco, the tenor was getting into bed, when a sudden swaying of the building startled him. He jumped back in terror, and before he and his fellow-artistes had quite realized what had happened, San Francisco was in ruins.

It is, of course, almost impossible to imagine what a great city looks like when razed to the ground; but an earthquake does not stop at that. Fire is its twin; and, amid fire and night and human terror, it can be said that nothing more terrible could befall any city. Then, the inevitable looting.

DESPOILING THE DEAD.

It is one of the saddest features of humanity that, no matter how great the misery of mankind may be, there are always plenty of persons ready to make capital out of it. Even in the twentieth century it is necessary to shoot on sight despoilers of the dead; and this was the first order issued to the troops hurrying to the relief of the ex-inhabitants of Messina. Now and again terrible mistakes will occur. Thus, a well-known citizen of San Francisco, who had been buried under the bodies of victims, succeeded in raising himself to his feet in the crude cemetery of the slain. He had not been a minute in this position, when a sentry shot him dead, under the impression that he was a looter.

In Japan, the houses in certain districts are built of a composition of wood and paper, so that, when the expected earthquake does arrive, the people will not be hurt by the falling buildings. From earthquakes and tidal waves our Eastern allies have suffered appalling losses. In 1891, more than 10,000 people were killed in an hour by an earthquake, and, five years later, twice that number succumbed to a tidal wave.

Only a few days ago, the Law Courts settled the financial question arising out of the earthquake at Kingston, Jamaica, when 800 persons were killed, including several members of an English party, which had chartered one of Sir Alfred Jones's steamers, in order to become acquainted with the island. A well-known English M. P. was being shaved, another was sitting in a verandah, a third was driving out, and a fourth was attending to his correspondence, when the disaster occurred. Kingston was comparatively lucky, in that the earthquake came in the middle of the day; and, although fire supervened, the inhabitants had a run for their lives.

In connection with this visitation, it is interesting to recall that the British insurance companies were the only corporations which expressed their willingness to meet their legal obligations, the others declining to pay in

any circumstances. The result has been to enhance greatly British reputation for fair play—and pay.

VOLCANO-GODS.

The world has a poor memory, and even Messina will be quickly forgotten. But there must be few who cannot recall the wiping out of St. Pierre, Martinique, a calamity which sent 30,000 men, women, and children to a premature grave. The earth literally opened and swallowed them up. Within a period of half an hour the whole country was converted into a huge crematorium. It is not to be wondered at that the superstitious dwellers in earthquake districts should believe that their gods live in volcanoes, and that, unless a certain number of human beings are sacrificed yearly, they will destroy the whole of the world.

It is a great tribute to the courage of mankind that, no sooner is a town destroyed or a city almost wiped out, than it is invariably rebuilt and repopulated. San Francisco is just recovering from its 1906 visitation, but there is no diminution of population to record; and Kingston is well on its way to prosperity. In South America, earthquake districts are abandoned for a time, and then the frightened people come back in batches, until the towns affected are restored to their wonted activity.

The year that witnessed the Californian capital's destruction also brought disaster to Valparaiso; but the latter, although more than two thousand deaths resulted, was even shadowed by the happenings at San Francisco. Earthquakes are part of the risks involved in citizenship in South America.

THE END OF THE WORLD.

So far as Great Britain is concerned, there have been numerous shocks, but no great loss of life. Scotland, Wales, and England have been visited in turn; but the only time that anything like panic occurred was in April, 1884, when the country vibrated from east to west, and from the Midlands to the South. Thousands of persons firmly believed that the end of the world had come; and when Ipswich heard that Northampton was being shaken, and both knew that Leicester and the surrounding country was rocking, their fears seemed confirmed. London did not escape, Hampstead suffering most. But the deaths that resulted were due to terror.

Scientists say that earthquakes are caused by the world tilting over, as it were; and, as countries suffer in proportion to their proximity to the equator, no doubt this is the best explanation.

REMOVAL WHOLESALE.

Dressed in the height of fashion, and bearing the unmistakable air of boredom associated with an effete aristocracy, the young fellow, who had evidently dined less wisely than well, stopped before a Bond Street beauty specialist's, and after studying the name-plate gravely for a few moments, rang the bell.

Promptly he was shown into the sanctum of the face-faker.

"Well, sir," inquired the specialist, "and what can I do for you?"

"Yesh, thash the question!" said the visitor inanely. "What *can* you do?"

"Oh, everything!" exclaimed the specialist. "Remove superfluous 'airs——"

"Thash the ticket!" cried the young man excitedly. "Look here! My ole uncle is a millionaire, an' his dibs'll be spread over six of us. Now, I should feel awfully obliged, ole man, if you'd set to work at onsh to remove five superfluous heirs!"

HOW ARE THE MIGHTY—

Baggs and Jaggs met, and Baggs and Jaggs got yarn-ing.

"I once knew a man, dear boy," began Baggs, "who was so ticklish on the bottoms of his feet that whenever he took a bath he had to walk about afterwards on a blotter. It was the only method of foot-drying that wouldn't throw him into fits."

"That's nothing, my dear fellow," retorted Jaggs. "I used to board at a place where the landlady was so nervous that, whenever the wind blew, she had to go out and grease the corners of the house, so the wind wouldn't creak when it went round them."

And then Baggs wept bitterly, for he had long held the championship, and was loth to relinquish it.

"NOT TO-DAY, WAITER!"

The bald epicure had dropped his caviare-on-toast. To let it lie seemed sinful. Stealthily, he stooped to pick it up.

His absent-minded neighbor felt a slight touch on the arm. He turned, and, perceiving the bald pate on a level with his elbow, imagined a plate beneath it.

"No, thank you, waiter," he murmured; "no melon. I'll take a little pineapple."

She had asked him strange questions, and strange thoughts ran through his mind.

"Madame," he said, "I owe you an apology."

"It is accepted."

"Good night," said Dick.

The woman responded, and went on her way.

"Well, I'll be shot, but I did deceive myself! I did make a blunder; and it is possible I've deceived myself to my cost. Great guns! what could those strange questions of the old lady mean? And her manner was indeed singular. I may have lost a chance."

The detective worked another change, and started to follow the woman; but in his amazement, while considering the strange adventure, he had lost time. She had disappeared, and he did not succeed in catching on to the trail again.

Dick went to his home, lost in deep thought, and the one question he kept putting to himself was—

"What did she mean? A mystery connected with my history. She was anxious to know my name; it would prove a key to the mystery. Well, we shall see."

On the day following the incidents narrated, Dick went down to the hotel where he had first met Sedgely. He found the young man. The place was a sort of head quarters for Sedgely.

"Have you seen Fleet?" asked Dick.

"No, but the fellow made a big hit at the game."

"He did?"

"Yes, he raked in some thousands, and he has skipped."

"I hardly think so."

"You may know better; but it's my idea."

Later Dick met Bragg, and he said

"You are just the man I am after. Benson wants to meet you."

"I am here."

"Yes; let's go over to the corner. We will have a smoke, and Benson will join us."

A little later Benson came in. He was a typical detective—a shrewd-faced, broad-shouldered, athletic man, with keen gray eyes that, when lighted up, were singularly piercing. He had met Dick, but did not remember him. The men had a little casual talk about the case, and finally Bragg said.

"I will leave you fellows alone. I have an appointment."

Bragg went away, and there came a great change over the demeanor of Benson. He fixed his keen eyes on Dick, and said:

"Young man, you are on to something."

"How do you know?"

"Bragg has repeated your little talks to me, and that is why I asked to see you."

"Did Bragg tell you I was on to something?"

"No. Bragg is a parrot. He can repeat well, that's all, and so is an invaluable fellow. Otherwise he doesn't amount to much."

"You know it?"

"You played him the first time you saw him. You pulled him all to pieces. You told him nothing. You can't pull me. You are not on to this case regularly, but you have got on to something. What is it?"

As intimated, Dick realized from the start that Benson was a very different man from Bragg, but he said:

"I am not on to anything."

"Are you afraid of me?"

"No."

"See here, if there is honor in this case, you can have it."

"I have no interest in the case. At one time I did think I had got on to something. I am satisfied now I was away off."

"Mebbe not. You met a woman. You did not want to give her away. Your sympathies were aroused. You thought it possible she might be innocent."

"Well?"

"It is just possible you are right."

Dick stared. Benson talked like one who was on to him.

"Have you run across a woman?"

"No. I am at sea. I haven't struck a single clew."

"You made a strange remark."

"I do often. What was the particular remark?"

"You said my sympathies had been aroused, that I had an idea that the woman was innocent, and that I might be right. What did you mean?"

"Just what I said."

"Is it possible that Louise Webster is wrongfully accused?"

"Certainly."

"Do you think so?"

"That is another question. Any person has the benefit of a doubt until they are convicted."

"You have a doubt?"

"I think there is a possibility that the girl has been wrongfully accused."

Dick was cunning, and he realized that he was talking to a wonderfully shrewd man. Benson, as Dick figured it, had formed a theory, and he was running in the line of our hero's thoughts in order to gain his confidence and draw Dick out; and he prepared to foil the game, and he even resolved to pull the great Benson. He said:

"If I had good reason to think that Louise Webster was innocent, it might alter a certain conclusion I had reached."

"You're a good one," said Benson. "You will win my admiration. Now come out straight. What do you want?"

"You sought me. What do you want?"

"I want to know just what you are on to, that's all."

"What led you to so positive a conclusion?"

"You are playing for points. If otherwise, you would just come out and say you did not know anything. You do know something. You are on to something. What is it?"

"I am on to something."

"Let's have it."

"When you open up a bit, I may speak out," was Dick's answer.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Young man, you're a good one," said the elder detective.

"Thank you again."

"On what point do you wish to be enlightened?"

"As to the possibility of the girl's innocence."

"Dick, I've taken a liking to you."

"Thank you."

"I am about to do with you something contrary to the rule of my life."

"I do not think you will have reason to regret it; and I will say I want the advantage of your experience and shrewdness."

"You shall have it."

"What is the possibility of the girl's innocence?"

"I have studied this case carefully and reached a positive conclusion. I believe the girl is innocent."

The detective spoke in a positive and emphatic manner.

"You are not deceiving me? This is not a steel?"

"I'd bet all I've earned in my life on her innocence."

Dick set in and told his story: told how he had first met the veiled woman on his way from Jersey City; told how he had laid for her, how he had met her; had seen her commit a robbery; and, indeed, related the whole story, word for word, incident for incident. Benson listened attentively, and did not once interrupt Dick; and when our hero had concluded, he said:

"There's nothing in it. Libbie Fleet is not Louise Belden."

"Why are you so sure?"

"Louise Belden, or Webster, is not a thief. She is a smart, bright, intelligent, pure-minded girl. She and Libbie could not be one and the same."

"But you forget, she may be under the influence of Fleet."

"Fleet could not make her an accomplished thief in a few months."

"But Libbie admitted to me she was Louise Belden."

Benson laughed, and said:

"You disappoint me here. I thought you were shrewder; but—" Benson stopped short.

"Well, what?"

"What makes you so positive the woman you met coming from Jersey City and Libbie are one and the same?"

"There is no doubt on that point."

"But there is a possibility that they are not one and the same. Let's get down to fine points."

"All right."

"What was the impression made upon you by the lady you first met?"

"I was charmed. I had never seen her face, but she made an impression on me that was singular and deep."

"And the other woman?"

"When I learned she was a trained thief, the spell was gone."

"You never felt the same charm in the presence of Libbie?"

"No."

"That settles it. Libbie and the veiled lady you met coming from Jersey City are not one and the same."

"But their methods were the same."

"That was a mere coincidence."

"And you think they were different persons?"

"Yes. But, Dick, what are you doing in New York?"

"Oh, I am on a little matter."

"You have a history, young man. Come; tell me your story."

"Bah! don't bother me. What we want is to solve the mystery of the robbery."

Benson had been studying Dick's face, and there was a strange look in his eyes and a singular cadence in his voice.

"You are becoming interested in this Belden robbery?"

"I am."

The eyes of Benson were fixed upon Dick, and there was a strange light in them as he said:

"It's not strange in one way; it is in another, that you should have an interest in the Belden case. It may be greater than you dream."

There was a singular significance in the tones of the detective's voice and a strange gleam in his eyes. Dick instantly demanded:

"Will you explain what you mean?"

"No, not now; but very remarkable things happen in this world. Mysteries pile on mysteries; facts and incidents run together; developments follow each other with singular exactness, and in my profession I have met with such wonderful running together of interests that at times I stand aghast. I can give a broader significance to the words of the poet who wrote:

"There is a destiny that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them as we may."

"You are surely throwing out very strange hints to me."

"Forget what I've said. I have not talked like an old detective. Good men rarely anticipate in their talk. I have done so."

"But there is a deep meaning behind your words."

"Well, yes."

"Why do you thus arouse my curiosity?"

"Events will develop all right. But it is very strange, yes, very strange. It is one of those old experiences of mine; and I will let things take their course."

"I want you to explain your words."

"Listen, Dick; tell me your history—your whole history—and I will explain my words."

There came a smile to Dick's face. He appreciated the man's extraordinary cunning and shrewdness. He appreciated that the

man Benson was playing him to draw out his narrative, and he said:

"There is nothing interesting in my history."

"Suppose you let me be the judge."

Dick thought he would be as cute as Benson, and he said:

"I was born in New York State of poor but honest parents. I went to school, and when I graduated I took a fancy to adopt the profession of a detective."

Benson's eyes were fixed upon Dick, and he said:

"That is your history?"

"Yes. There is nothing remarkable in that, is there?"

"Well there is something remarkable in your ability to tell a lie."

"Do you mean to insult me?" and Dick glared.

"Oh, hush, lad; you and I will not quarrel."

"But I will not let any man talk to me in that way."

"I am your friend, and some day I will be of great service to you. Let's change the subject, and talk business."

"You think you know something about me?"

"No, I only know I've met you, and are a very bright young fellow; a little impetuous, but you've done good work. I would have been proud to lay claim to your work myself. We will work, and we will work together."

"How about Bragg?"

"He is all right to paddle his own canoe."

"You don't propose to take him in with us?"

"Oh, yes; we will take all he gets and give him nothing in return, and he will never know the difference."

"Then you do not think much of his abilities?"

"Oh, yes, he is a smart man in his way."

"Will you tell me what you meant when you said I had more interest in the Belden case than I dreamed?"

"I can not tell."

"You mean you will not tell?"

Benson smiled, and said:

"You are pretty cute; but I will put it this way: I have nothing to tell."

"You had a reason for your words. They are not idle words. Then what do you mean?"

"It is possible you may have more interest in the Belden case than your dream. I must have time to investigate, and if I reach a conclusion, I will let you know."

"You might give me a hint."

"I can not now. Some day you may tell me your true history, and then I will be on safer ground."

Dick was mystified by the old detective's words and manner but he determined to drop the subject, and Benson said:

"Dick, you must run down the lady you met at the Jersey City ferry-house."

"I am afraid I've lost all the clues."

"Oh, I guess not. But let me ask you one question: did she have a good look at your face?"

It was a strange question. Our hero did not understand it.

"Certainly she saw my face."

"Did she look at you sharply?"

"I did not observe that she exhibited any particular interest in me."

"She only had a good chance to see your face just before you parted."

"Yes."

"Did she start or show any surprise?"

"No."

"That's all."

"You are having fun at my expense."

"Oh, no, I am working up a lead."

"Why not explain?"

"I have not got on to anything yet that warrants an explanation."

"There is an explanation?"

"There may be later on, but now let's get down to business. You follow up the trail, and call on me if you need help. When you discover this girl again, let me know."

"The Jersey City girl is not Louise Webster."

"You are sure?"

"You should know: you are cute—yes, very cute."

Benson spoke in an odd sort of way, and he added, an instant later:

"You will follow her up on that tack. You had better call me in as soon as you find her. It may save time and trouble."

"You can identify Louise Webster?"

"I can."

"If I run across her, I will call you in."

"Good; now, Dick, follow up the trail for the Jersey woman, and report."

"I may."

"You will. Good-day."

When Dick parted from Benson he was very thoughtful. He began by revolving in his mind all the strange words of the man from California, and he muttered:

"He is just making fun of me."

At that instant a recollection shot through Dick's mind, and he said:

"Hold on; I don't know about that. Now, it strikes me that his questions were in line with the strange questions put to me by that mysterious old woman. Well, well; I'll get on to this business some day. I'll just lay low; I'll give nothing away."

That evening Dick was walking along the street when a man, evidently a stranger in New York, stopped him, and inquired as to the nearest route to a certain section of the city, and he was looking in Dick's face. Suddenly he appeared startled, and asked:

"What is your name, my friend?"

"Brown," answered Dick.

"Brown—Brown?" the man repeated, and walked away.

Dick determined to go down to the vicinity where he had last seen the Jersey girl, as he called her. He made up his mind that it was just possible that Libbie Fleet and the Jersey girl were not one and same person. He was not fully assured, but he thought it a good idea to trail a little. With that conclusion in view, he had hung around for some time, when lo! he beheld a familiar figure. It was the singular old woman who had accosted him the previous night.

Dick was under a new cover. He made up his mind to follow the old woman. It was a low quarter of the city. There were a few fairly respectable tenement houses, but the neighborhood was not a choice one by any means.

Dick followed up the old lady, who walked slowly, and he had little difficulty in shadowing her. She proceeded along until she came to one of the fairly respectable tenement houses, when she entered.

"I'll just follow in there," said our hero.

He darted forward. The street door was open, and he ascended the stairs. He was too late however. The old woman had entered a room, and he was at sea.

All was still in the rooms occupied by the strange old woman. One thing was assured, however, beyond peradventure: he had run down the veiled woman of Jersey City, and he knew he would shadow down to some strange denouement. Dick descended to the street.

CHAPTER XX.

THE next day the detective assumed a proper disguise and went down to the vicinity of the tenement-house where the veiled woman resided. He hung around all day, but the lady he wanted to shadow did not appear.

"I will drop around here about dark, and lay around."

During the afternoon Dick met Benson. The latter asked:

"Well, young man, what progress have you made?"

"I have discovered that the Jersey City veiled woman and the woman Libbie Fleet are not one and the same person."

"That is progress, truly. What else have you discovered?"

"I am on the track of the Jersey City veiled woman."

"Better yet."

"Have you picked up anything?" asked Dick.

"Yes, but I will not give it to you fully. There have been some new developments in the Belden case."

"Tending to establish the innocence of Louise Webster?"

"I can't say that the developments take that form at present, but they may do so in the end."

"Will you tell me of this new phase of the affair?"

"Not at present. It may interfere with your investigations. You can wait; it is all right, but there has come a mystery on a mystery. It is very important that we discover Louise Webster."

"Will you arrest her?"

"We will wait and see. Follow up your investigations. Make no arrests, but report to me."

Just at dark our hero returned to the tenement house. About nine o'clock his patience was rewarded. The veiled woman stepped forth, and started up the street. Our hero followed, muttering:

"At last!"

Dick noticed that the mysterious woman he was shadowing walked and acted like an old person, as a rule; but at times she would forget herself, and when she was crossing Broadway, a cab came along, driven at a furious gait. The woman skipped out of the way with a grace and agility that were very remarkable. Indeed, no old woman could have so moved, even to save her life.

"Ana!" muttered Dick: "I've got you now, my mystery!"

The woman walked along for some time, and our hero was at a loss to understand her movements. At length he saw her pass a man, and, to his amazement, he saw her and the man exchange signals.

"Halloo!" he muttered, "what does this mean? Aha, old lady!"

A moment later the two came together. They stood and conversed for some time. The detective would have given a great deal to have overheard the conversation, but they met in the open street and he could not approach and listen without attracting attention. They talked for a long time; but at length they separated, but not until Dick had seen the veiled woman pass over what he deemed was money.

"Well," he muttered, "this is suggestive. What have I struck?"

The woman walked slowly away, and our hero determined to make a bold stroke. He worked a transform. He made himself up as he had appeared when he met the lady on that night at the Jersey ferry. He kept upon her track until she left Broadway and started down a side street in the direction of her house; then he made a little side turn, crossed and walked toward her, and when near enough, he stopped directly in front of her, and said:

"Good-evening."

The woman came to a halt. She appeared greatly disturbed.

"You do not recognize me?" Dick said.

"I can not recall ever having seen you."

"It was my privilege to do you a service a short time ago."

"Possibly I am too near-sighted. Make yourself known."

"You remember being assailed in Greenwich Street?"

"I remember."

"You will recall, a young man ran to your assistance?"

"I remember."

"I am the man."

"Well?" The "well" was spoken sharply.

"I am glad to meet you again."
 "I will again thank you for your service and say good night."
 "One good turn deserves another. I am in trouble now."
 "I am sorry; but how can an old woman like me aid you?"
 "Let me tell you my story."
 "I would gladly. I will at some other time, but I have not the time to spare now."
 "If you do not listen to my story now you can not aid me."
 "I am sorry, but I can not listen now. It is too late."
 "Oh, it was later when we first met. Come; you alone can help me."
 "How can I help you?"
 "You must listen to my story."
 "You are very persistent."
 "I am. I need counsel at once."
 "Well, tell me your story."
 "It will take a long time for me to tell you my story. Invite me to your home."
 "I can not do that."
 "I will call upon you to-morrow."
 "But you do not know where I reside."
 "Oh, yes, I do."
 "This is very strange. I never told you where my home is."
 "I know it. I learned by accident where you reside. You can go on to your home, and I will follow in a few moments."
 The veiled woman appeared very much discomposed, and she said
 "I suspect that you have been dogging my steps."
 "I have."

CHAPTER XXI.

The veiled woman appeared startled. Her voice, for an instant, was natural—it was not the voice of an old woman. It was that strange, charming, and thrillingly musical voice that had left such an impression upon him since first he heard it.
 "I do wish you would tell me why you seek me."
 "Invite me to your rooms and I will."
 "It would not be proper, sir."
 "Why not? There can be no harm for an elderly lady like yourself inviting a young man to her rooms in order to aid him in his hour of trouble."
 "I will aid you without listening to your story."
 "It is a pity money will not aid."
 "What do you need?"
 "Advice."
 "You will find me a poor adviser."
 "You are the only one who can aid me."
 The veiled woman meditated, and finally muttered:
 "There is some treachery meditated here."
 She did not mean our hero to hear her words, but in her excitement she betrayed herself.
 "There is no treachery intended. I need your advice. Possibly you need mine."
 "I need yours?"
 "Yes. Your own safety may depend upon this interview."
 The trepidation of the veiled woman was very marked.
 "Tell me what you mean?"
 "You must listen to my story."
 "You insist upon telling it to me?"
 "Yes. Let us go to your home."
 "Come; tell me here."
 "No; you have had one interview on the street already."
 The woman gave a start. Dick was determined to carry his point and force the issue.
 "You have been dogging my steps?"
 "I have."
 The woman meditated a moment, and then asked:
 "Who has urged you to follow my steps?"
 "No one."
 "And when you have told your story you will leave me?"
 "After you have advised me."
 "You can lead me to my home?"
 "I can. I will not lose sight of you until I tell my tale. I will follow you; so you may as well consent to invite me."
 "You forget that my home is my castle. I can summon the police, and have you arrested."
 "Yes, you can; but you dare not."
 "You are bolder and bolder."
 "I am. Yes, you must let me tell you my tale, and you must— you shall hear it to-night."
 "You will not go to some other place to tell your tale?"
 "No."
 The woman thought an instant, and then said:
 "Come!"
 Dick had carried his point. The veiled woman started off, walking rapidly, and our hero kept by her side. She did not go direct to her home. She did not walk toward the tenement house. She went in an entirely different direction. Dick knew that she was leading him from her home, and not toward it; and since he had said he knew where she lived, he remarked:
 "You are not keeping your word."
 "How is that?"
 "You were to take me to your home."
 "I will lead you to my home."
 "Very well; one place will do as well as another. I only remind you that I know where you reside."
 "You are evidently mistaken; indeed, you are laboring under a mistake from first to last. But you were so persistent, I thought the best way to do was to convince you by actual facts."
 "All right; I am willing to be so convinced."

They proceeded along to a very respectable neighborhood and stopped in front of a fine three-story brown-stone-front house.
 "You did me a service. I owe as much as this to you. I will take you into my house and let you tell your story to me."

"That is all I ask."
 They ascended the stoop. The woman opened the door with a night-key. Our hero was amazed; but he was determined to see the adventure through and let the affair shape itself. They entered the house. The woman led the way through an elegantly furnished parlor to a rear parlor or library. The gas was burning, and upon the table stood a large shaded lamp. Dick was amazed. He said nothing; it was all very thrilling and novel to him under all the circumstances, but it just suited him, because he was sure of his premises.

"Take a seat," said the woman, in an imperious tone.
 Dick obeyed.
 "I will join you as soon as I have removed my hat."
 The woman left the room. She was not gone over two minutes. When she returned, our hero gazed in astonishment and uttered a cry of amazement.
 "Now, sir," said the lady, who had reappeared unveiled, "I am ready to listen to your story, and aid you if I can."
 The words "aid you if I can," under the circumstances, were very important.

The lady who entered the room unveiled was not the Jersey City veiled woman, but the old lady whom our hero had been accosted by, and who had asked him the strange questions upon that occasion—questions that had since caused him to do a great deal of thinking. The young man was stricken absolutely speechless. He had made a mistake or he had been fooled, but one thing was certain: the good old lady who had confronted him was not the lady whom he had met the night he encountered his Jersey City adventure.

"Come, sir," said the old lady. "I am ready to listen to you."
 Dick was wonderfully quick-witted and possessed a marvelous memory. A suspicion ran through his mind. He believed a strange game had been worked on him. He knew that the Jersey City lady and the old lady confronting him were friends, and possibly confederates. He had trailed the woman before him to the tenement house of the other woman; but there was one thing missing. While talking to the veiled lady on the street there had come back to him the old charm. In the presence of the lady who confronted him, the charm had vanished. There was nothing in the tones of her voice that thrilled him.

"You remember what you said," remarked Dick.
 "Yes, I remember what I said."
 "But you forget your remark."
 "What remark?"
 "You certainly can recall it."
 "I can not. I was to listen to your narrative. I was to aid you if I could."

"Oh, no, no, you forget."
 At this instant Dick had a second surprise—the greatest of his life. A beautiful young lady, not more than two-and-twenty, entered the room. The young man gazed agast.

"My daughter," said the old woman.
 "Mamma, why did you not tell me you had brought company home with you?"
 "Oh, you beautiful, guilty cheat!" was the thought that ran through our hero's mind.

The old charm returned. The device did not work. He recognized that voice. He never would have recognized in the beautiful girl before him the hideous face that had been disclosed by the up-raised veil. But that voice, yes, that voice he would have recognized it a hundred years hence, so deep had been its impression upon his mind, and with such a charm had it taken possession of his soul and memory. Yes, like a flash, the whole trick was revealed to him.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALTHOUGH Dick had discovered the whole trick, he did not mean to give it away. He really admired the coolness and nerve with which the device had been carried out and he realized that he had fallen upon a mystery far deeper and more wonderful and intricate than he had dared dream. He acknowledged the introduction to the daughter, and said:

"I am delighted to meet your daughter, madame, and I am very much embarrassed."

"You do not wish to tell me your trouble in my daughter's presence?"

"You have guessed it, madame."

Dick observed a little telegraphic communication going on between mother and daughter. A sort of finger telephone skillfully done, but our hero was up to it. He did not make known his discovery, however.

"You need not fear to speak before my daughter. There are no secrets between us."

"I fear, madame, I have made a very serious blunder. I will ask permission to retire."

"No; you must not go. Certainly you have made a blunder. But my curiosity is aroused."

"So is mine, madame."

"How?"

"I mistook you for another person—a person for whom I had done a slight service. You permitted me to believe that I was addressing the party whose identity I suspected. Your veil aided you. But I will atone for my mistake by going away at once."

"No, you must not go. I saw that you had made a mistake, but I thought I would humor you; all you said seemed so strange."

Dick discovered that the younger and beautiful lady was secretly prompting the elder lady. He did not let it be perceived

that he saw what was going on. And he also discovered that, once having worked their scheme successfully, they were anxious to detain him. They wished to find out something about him. He determined to take advantage of the situation, and again asserted:

"I think I had better go."

"No; remain. Tell me your story; and although you made a mistake as to my identity, I may yet aid you."

"No, madame; you can not aid me. I will go."

"I am entitled to an explanation when my identity is mistaken under such singular circumstances. I am entitled to know what led to the mistake, for my future protection."

The younger lady was skillfully suggesting all the elder lady said.

"I can not explain, madame. I had better go."

"No; remain."

"I must have time to think. I will call upon you. You remember what you said about that before?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Will you repeat the words?"

The dictation came, and the elder lady said:

"I told you it would not proper for you to call on me."

"And what did I say in answer?"

"You said there was nothing improper in a young man calling upon a lady of my age."

"What I said is true. Madame, I will call upon you at some future time."

"No; this mistaken identity must be explained."

"Madame, I have met you before."

"When and where?"

"It is not necessary for me to say; but you are not she I expected to meet to-night. I was mistaken, and I must hasten away."

"Why this hurry?"

"I desire to meet the party for whom I mistook you."

"Do you expect to meet her?"

"Madame, you are inquiring very particularly into my affairs."

"I am, and I have good reason. You have associated my identity with this other party. I want to know what it means."

"Some other time I will tell you my story."

"Tell it now."

Dick had decided upon the story he would tell, and he knew that when he told his tale he would give the two bright ladies a greater surprise than they had given him. Indeed, he would give them the one great surprise of their lives.

Our hero enjoyed the situation greatly. The two ladies had hoped to throw him completely off the track. They had carried out a most singular scheme. It beat anything our hero had ever encountered, and yet it was of all adventures the most exciting and pleasant one of his life. He saw the Jersey City lady unmasked, beheld her in all her wonderful beauty, and she was indeed a most beautiful woman. He knew how it was that she had so charmed him and how it was that charm had been dispelled when in the presence of others. The surprise he had in store for the two women just made him laugh inwardly with an enjoyment that was keen and rare. He fixed his eyes on the younger woman and knew that he was gazing on the face of Louise Webster, and he knew that the wonderfully discerning Benson, the veteran detective, was ~~correct~~ in his conclusions that Louise Webster was innocent; and the fact that she was innocent and a fugitive, deepened and intensified the mystery that surrounded her. He wondered what the connection could be between the younger and elder woman. The one lived in a tenement-house, the other in comparatively a palace; and the fact that the younger woman had found it necessary to go round as an old woman, her face "worked" to hideousness, was all wonderfully mysterious and exciting. It was the adventure of his life; and what was more, the characters were so interesting, especially the younger lady, so beautiful, so bright, so courageous.

"I am half inclined," said Dick, "to tell my story."

The two ladies betrayed eager expectancy, as Dick said:

"It can not concern you; it may interest you. I can not understand why you brought me here. I am delighted and amazed."

"I brought you here because I am a philanthropist. I became interested in your appeal, and thought I might aid you."

"My narrative is a curious one. You can not aid me. The party for whom I mistook you can aid me."

"And for whom did you mistake me?"

"An elderly lady whom I met under singular conditions, who, while possessing a hideous face, singularly charmed me."

As the detective uttered the words, he covertly glanced at the face of the younger lady, and proceeding, he said:

"She spoke strange, mysterious words, which, when I came to ponder upon them, aroused certain suspicions in my mind."

"And how is it you thought I was the lady?"

"I thought you came from the lodgings of the lady."

"If you know where the lady resides, why did you not call upon her?"

"I had just learned where she resides."

"And why did you seek that lady?"

"To tell her my story."

"And you have promised to tell it to us."

"Why should I tell my story to those who have no interest in it?"

"We may have an interest."

"Very well; you shall hear it. I never knew who were my parents. I was adopted by an old couple, educated and reared by them. When the old man was dying he made a revelation to me. He told me my real name, and told me that somewhere I had a sister living. In some mysterious manner I was provided with ample means, and I set out to find my sister, and I have traveled the world over to find her. That is my story."

The two ladies looked at each other, and disappointment appeared upon their faces; but the younger lady asked:

"What led you to think that the lady with the hideous face, as you describe her, could aid you?"

"Well, a strange feeling came over me to that effect—a feeling I could not shake off."

"Had you any real warrant for thinking she could aid you?"

"Excuse me," said Dick. "Why should I tell you? Certainly you ladies see now that you can not aid me."

"What is your name?"

"Ah! I am known as Brown."

"What is your real name?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you my real name now."

"A strange suspicion has run through my mind," said the younger lady. "If you will tell me your real name, it is possible I may give you a suggestion."

"You are very kind; and do not consider me rude when I add you are very cute in seeking to gratify your curiosity."

The lady blushed, and Dick added:

"I will tell you the name of my sister."

"Do, please."

"Her name is Louise Webster."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The effect of our hero's announcement was startling. The younger lady uttered a cry and fell back. The elder lady sat with pallid face gazing aghast, and Dick sat with a smile upon his face. He had fired his shot. The ladies had given him a surprise, but he felt he had more than given them a Roland for an Oliver. There followed an interval of silence, broken by Dick, who said, in a cool, deliberate tone:

"Ladies, the name of my sister appears to startle you. It is possible that from what I see as the effect of my announcement that you can aid me after all. It appears that the name Louise Webster is not an unfamiliar one to you."

The two ladies remained silent, but gazed in speechless amazement.

"I am surprised, ladies, as well as yourselves. What does this exhibition of genuine astonishment on your part mean?"

The younger lady had recovered her nerve, and she said:

"We are Californians, and have heard the story of Louise Webster."

Dick gazed at the lovely woman in amazed admiration. She had cast aside his bombshell and had turned the tables on him with a skill and coolness that were simply marvelous, and she said:

"You certainly are not ignorant of the notoriety your sister has recently obtained, sir?"

"I do not know."

Dick could speak truthfully, for his sister had not attained to any sudden notoriety.

"I knew Louise Webster," said the younger lady.

"You knew my sister?" queried Dick, with cool audacity.

"I knew Louise Webster. I did not know she had a brother or that there was any mystery as concerned her parentage."

"Will you describe her to me? I never saw my sister."

"Young man," said the old lady, "some one has misled you when they told you Louise Webster was your sister. I am an old lady. I knew her parents well. There was no mystery as concerned her parentage. She was an only child. It is a singular thing that any one should have suggested to you that her parents were yours."

"Are you sure there was not some mystery connected with the history of Mr. Webster?"

"I am sure—absolutely sure. I knew him from his infancy."

"And you tell me he had but one child?"

"But one—a daughter."

"And this daughter is now a fugitive?"

Dick spoke coolly.

"Yes, she is a fugitive."

"And she is not my sister?"

"She can not possibly be your sister."

"Do you know anything concerning the accusation against her?"

"Do you?"

"I know, through the papers, that she is accused of having robbed her guardian."

"And if she were your sister, what did you propose to do when you found her?"

It was the younger lady who spoke in a deliberate tone.

"I proposed to prove her innocence."

"Now that you know she is not your sister, what will you do?"

"Prove her innocence."

The ladies looked amazed.

"Do you believe her innocent?"

"Yes, I do. But answer me one question: How do you know so positively that she is not my sister?"

The latter question was addressed directly to the elder lady, who, after a moment, said:

"There are reasons, which I will disclose, that make it a more remarkable meeting than you can discern."

"Do so."

"First, let me ask your purpose in claiming Miss Webster as your sister?"

"My narrative was partly true."

"Well?"

"And if I were deceived as to the balance of it, that is not my fault."

"If you were ever told that Louise Webster was your sister, you were certainly deceived."

"What makes you so positive?"

There followed a moment's silence, and Dick saw the younger lady pass instructions; and the elder lady said:

"Mr. Webster was my brother."

Dick pretended to be very much surprised, and then said:

"Then this lady is your niece and Louise Webster the fugitive."

Dick's conclusion, as announced, was received with composure. It was evident the two ladies had determined to make the identity of Louise Webster known. Dick was equally cool, for he said:

"Now, then, if I am, we are done playing at cross-purposes."

"Yes; we are done playing at cross-purposes. And you will admit that your narrative was a fable?"

"I will."

"What was your purpose in telling it?"

"I knew that your niece was Louise Webster the moment she entered the room. I knew that I had met her on the street. I knew it was she who led me to this house. I knew that she substituted you, madame, for herself after we entered the house, and I admired her skill and coolness in seeking to conceal her identity. But I was not deceived. I told my fable as an offset to the little device that had been played upon me."

The ladies listened quietly, and the elder lady said:

"I realized all that you admit, and that is why I determined to throw off the mask, and learn by plain, truthful talk between us your purpose in shadowing my niece."

"I will speak truly now, and expect equal frankness in return."

"You will be met on your own grounds."

"Thank you."

Dick threw back his lapel and disclosed his badge. The ladies did not appear surprised, and the elder lady said:

"You are an officer?"

"I am, and I am attached to the force in San Francisco."

"And you were sent on to shadow my niece?"

"I was not."

"You have shadowed her without orders. Will you explain?"

"My meeting with Miss Webster was purely accidental."

"Granted; still you may have been sent on to shadow her."

"I was not; and at the time I first met Miss Webster I did not know of the robbery in California; I had never heard the name of Miss Webster; I had never read about the case."

"Why have you since become interested in it?"

"Because I am convinced that Miss Webster is absolutely innocent."

There came a glow to the face of the younger lady, and a brightness to her beautiful eyes.

"Then why did you shadow her?"

"I heard the story of the robbery after my meeting with your niece, from a detective from San Francisco."

"What led you to associate the lady you met with Miss Webster?"

"I discovered the night she first revealed her face to me that she was disguised."

"You did?"

"I did; and I discovered that she was young and beautiful, and not the hideous-looking creature she tried to make herself appear."

"You say you learned the story from a California detective? Has he been sent on to arrest her?"

"Yes."

"And you told him you had found her?"

"I did not at once."

"Why not?"

"Because I was certain of her innocence; and I made up my mind to thwart the detectives and aid the lady."

"You were kind. But why did you intend to aid her?"

"Because I believed she was innocent."

"You have since told the detective that you were on her track. Why did you do so?"

"Because I made a discovery. He believed in her innocence."

The two ladies exchanged glances.

"He is here to arrest her and believes in her innocence?"

"Yes."

"You told him you were on the track of the lady?"

"Yes."

"Did you tell him the circumstances under which you met her?"

"I did."

"And what did he say?"

"Find her."

"Is he not fooling you? Is he not seeking to betray you?"

"No."

"What will he do when you deliver my niece into his hands?"

"I will not deliver her into his hands."

"What will you do?"

"Seek to establish her innocence!" was the brave answer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"But what makes you so sure of the innocence of my niece? Have you any evidence?"

"No positive evidence."

"You know how positive the evidence is against her, and still believe in her innocence?"

"Yes."

"And you will not disclose your own identity?"

"I will. You and I have met before, madame."

"I can not recall it."

"Yes, we have met before, and I am very much surprised that you do not recognize me."

"I do not."

"We met under circumstances that should have impressed my face upon your memory."

"I do not remember ever having seen you before, sir. Will you recall it to my mind?"

"I will; and I will say further that it is strange that you should be the aunt of Miss Webster."

"You arouse my curiosity."

"We have exchanged several surprises?"

"We have."

"I have another one for you."

Quick as lightning, Dick worked a transform right in the presence of the ladies. He resumed his natural appearance. He appeared before them as he had appeared at the time he held the interview with the elder lady, when she had pressed him with such strange questions in a persistent manner, and when he stood disclosed, the ladies gazed in amazement.

"You recall now when and where you met me?" And he added: "You see, two can play at the game of disguises."

The two ladies looked at our hero, and then exchanged glances. It had been a night of surprises—the most startling surprises and dénouements.

"Now then," continued Dick, "will you explain the meaning of your persistent questioning of me upon the night we met? You remember we have promised to be perfectly frank?"

"I am amazed," said the lady. "This is the most remarkable series of incidents that ever occurred."

"Yes, we have had a succession of surprises."

"I asked you a question," the other replied. "You did not answer me. Will you answer my question now?"

"I have not been treated with sufficient frankness to warrant it," "We have been frank with you; we have placed ourselves in your power."

"How?"

"You can arrest Miss Webster and gather in the reward. Come, tell me who you are?"

"Why are you so anxious to know?"

"I have one more surprise for you. It is possible you are more deeply concerned in the robbery of Mr. Belden than you dream." Dick recalled the words of Benson. He sat lost in meditation.

"Come now," said the lady, "tell me who you are?"

"My real name is Richard Velsor."

"That is your real name?"

"I believe it to be my name."

There came a look of deep interest to the lady's face, and she asked:

"Is there a mystery as concerns your parentage?"

"I told you a tale; you thought it was a fable. I told you later it was partly true. There is a mystery about my parentage."

"Why not tell me your story?"

Again Dick meditated a moment, and then said:

"I tell you in strictest confidence."

"You need not fear; and I doubt not I have a greater revelation for you than you have for me."

Dick proceeded and told his story—told it in full detail. He was urged on by a strange presentiment and premonition. The ladies listened with eager attention, and during his narrative exchanged glances of singular significance; and when it was concluded the elder lady asked:

"You have never seen the man who left you with the old Frenchman?"

"No."

"Did the old Frenchman ever hear from him?"

"Never."

"Have you since tried to run him down?"

"I have."

"Have you ever got upon his track?"

"Never?"

"I think you are on his track now."

It was Dick's turn to gaze in amazement, and he asked:

"What do you mean?"

"I said it was possible you might be interested in the Belden robbery. Mr. Belden was your grandfather."

Dick nearly fell out of his chair. The announcement came like thunder out of a clear sky to him. He at least had met the surprise of his life. He sat and gazed in speechless amazement. Never in all his life had he received such a shock. It was some time before he found voice to say:

"What does your announcement mean?"

"It means that a strange destiny has shaped the incidents that brought you and me together this night."

"How do you know that your revelation is the truth?"

"There is no doubt in my mind as to its truth, unless—" The lady stopped short.

"Unless what?"

"You have told us another fable."

"I have told you the absolute truth."

"Your narrative was hardly necessary to establish your identity."

"What do you mean?"

"I was walking along the Bowery the other night. I saw a young man gazing in a window. His face struck me as a familiar one. He stood under the glare of light from a shop window. I studied his face well. And I finally recognized how it was it appeared so familiar. It was the resemblance."

"To whom?"

"His mother."

"And my mother lives? Who is she?"

"The daughter of Mr. Belden, the man who was robbed."

"This is wonderful."

"It is wonderful."

"But there may be some mistake."

"There can not possibly be a mistake. Can there, Louise?"

The appeal was made to the younger lady, who said:

"There can be no mistake."

"And my mother lives?"

"Your mother lives."

"And my father?"
 There came no answer.
 "Tell me of my father."
 "That revelation must come later."
 "You know about him?"
 "Your mother will tell you all concerning your father."
 "Where is my mother?"
 Again the two ladies looked at each other, and remained silent.
 "Will you tell me about my mother?"
 "Later on. We must speak of other matters first. But it is strange that you should have been the one to run down Louise Webster. It is strange that you should be a detective."
 "I have devoted myself to the solution of the mystery of my life."
 "That mystery is now solved."
 "Answer one question: Is your niece innocent?"
 "She is."
 "Can you prove her innocence?"
 "I can."
 "Why do you not do so?"
 She did not answer until the younger lady said:
 "Tell him, auntie."
 "Louise became a fugitive to shield another."
 Dick's face assumed a pallid hue.
 "Who is that other?" he asked in a husky tone.
 "Do not press that question."
 "A terrible suspicion runs through my mind."
 The beautiful Louise here interposed, and said:
 "Not to shield another. I am a fugitive at the request of another."
 "Of whom?"
 "Your mother."
 "Who is the really guilty party?"
 "I do not know."
 "Whom do you suspect? Is it my mother?"
 "Your mother? No; your mother is the daughter of the man who was robbed."
 "If your announcement to me is true, and I am interested in this case, I suspect that it is my father whom you shield."
 "No, it is not your father. Your father is supposed to be dead. If he is dead, he died many years ago."
 "Then you are not sure he is dead?"
 "No; but your mother has lived as a widow since the night you were placed in charge of the old Frenchman."
 "Why not tell me the story?"
 "That you will learn later on."
 "Where is my mother?"
 Again the ladies were silent.
 "You are silent when I mention my mother. Why tell me a part and not tell me all?"
 "I can not enter into full explanations. I can only say there were reasons why my niece permitted suspicion to rest upon her. At any moment she could clear herself of all suspicion."
 "Tell me about my mother."
 "After your grandfather's death we received a letter from your mother saying she would come to New York."
 "Proceed," said Dick in an eager tone.
 "She started for New York, and never arrived here."

CHAPTER XXV.

Poor Dick! he was a man of iron, and yet he was being sadly rent and torn. He leaped to his feet, saying:
 "My mother started for New York, and she has not arrived? When did she start?"
 "A month ago."
 "And you have not heard from her?"
 "Not since she left Chicago. My niece had gone over to meet her on an in-coming train the night you first met her."
 Dick turned suddenly to Louise, and said:
 "Who was that man you met on Broadway to-night?"
 "The conductor of the train on which your mother traveled to Chicago."
 "Did you get any information from him?"
 "I did."
 "Tell me all. I have work to do. Yes, I will find this woman, whether she be my mother or not."
 "You will be searching for your mother."
 "That may need proof; but I will solve the mystery of her disappearance."
 "You say the fact of her being your mother needs proof. Then you doubt my story?"
 "I do not; but you may have reached conclusions on deceiving premises."
 "I can give you the proofs."
 "Do so."
 The lady opened an album that lay upon the table before her. She slipped out a photograph and handed it to Dick, with the remark:
 "Do you need greater proof?"
 Dick glanced at the picture. It was the portrait of a lady less than forty, a very handsome woman; but the moment his eyes rested upon the picture he stood transfixed. The ladies let him gaze a few moments, and then the elder said:
 "What do you think now?"
 "The proof is ample. If that is the picture of the daughter of the late Mr. Belden, then Mr. Belden was indeed my grandfather."
 "Yes, he was your grandfather. Did you ever see a more striking resemblance of son to mother?"
 "I never did."
 "You are not surprised that your face attracted me?"

"I am not."
 "Then you know that the missing lady is your mother?"
 "She is my mother."
 "She started for New York secretly. She wrote to me that she was coming. She had obtained proofs that would have dispelled the shadow that overhangs my niece's reputation."
 "No one knew of her departure?"
 "No."
 "You heard from her when in Chicago?"
 "Yes."
 "What information does the conductor give you?"
 "You can see him; but I have a suggestion to make."
 It was the younger woman who spoke.
 "I will regard any suggestion you may make."
 "Do not let him know that the missing lady is a relative of yours. Meet him as a detective."
 "Your plan is a good one; but has he any clues?"
 "Yes."
 "Does my mother live, or has she been murdered?"
 "I think she lives."
 "I will see this man. Where will I meet him?"
 "You are a detective and very shrewd for an amateur."
 "Thank you."
 "You marked him well?"
 "I did."
 "He is to meet me to-morrow night at the same time and place where I met him to night."
 "I am to meet him instead of you?"
 "Yes; and you will know how to introduce yourself, and how to draw the information from him."
 "I will. And now, how about yourself?"
 "You are our adviser now."
 "You must not return to your lodgings in the tenement-house."
 "I have decided to remain here."
 "Here you will be safe; but do not go on the street."
 "Why not?"
 "There are two detectives; one believes in your innocence, the other doesn't."
 "I do not fear arrest now."
 "How is that?"
 "If your mother lives, she can establish my innocence; if she is dead, I can do it."
 "And now you will follow my advice?"
 "We will."
 "Then I will give you my instructions now," said our hero.
 Dick gave the ladies certain instructions, and they held a long explanatory conversation. It was after midnight when Dick left the house. He went over to Broadway, and lay around a certain quarter until he was rewarded by meeting Benson.
 "Halloo, young man!" said the veteran. "You have some news for me."
 "Does my face tell anything?"
 Benson smiled. His quick glance looked our hero over, and he asked:
 "What do you mean by that question?"
 "Well, I can't say I have much news. I've come for information."
 "Well, let's hear your inquiry."
 "You used strange words to me when last we met. I've been thinking over what you said."
 "And what do you make out, my little man?"
 "Nothing."
 "You're in hard luck."
 "I am; and I've come to you to help me out."
 "Open your budget."
 "Now, is it possible I may be interested in this Belden affair to a degree greater than I dream?"
 "Well, some day I'll tell you."
 "You told me there was a new phase of the Belden affair. What is the new phase?"
 "I'll tell you later on."
 "Why not tell me now?"
 "I want to keep you to work in one particular direction."
 "Then I will tell you. The Widow Belden started for New York."
 "Halloo! you've struck something."
 "No trouble to get on to that phase."
 "You are not precisely frank, young man."
 "It's true."
 "Yes; but you don't tell me all."
 "She left secretly, and has not arrived in New York."
 "Eh?" The detective gave a start, and looked sharply at Dick, meditated a moment, and then said:
 "I reckon we will fail, Dick. You're going back on me."
 "How?"
 "You are giving me a steer."
 "No, I am not."
 "You say Mrs. Belden never arrived in New York. Where did you get the information?"
 "That is the particular line I am running."
 "Then you know something?"
 "I am not a fool."
 "Tell me what you know."
 "Not until you open up fully to me."
 The veteran looked our hero over and over.
 "It won't do, Dick," he said. "You can not play me that way."
 "I am not seeking to play you."
 "You say Mrs. Belden did not arrive in New York?"
 "She did not."
 "Then you have got on to something?"

"I need not tell you that; you know it."
 "That is an admission. Come, you had better give everything to me."
 "Not until you open up to me."
 "What do you want me to tell you?"
 "How I can possibly be interested in this case outside of a professional interest."
 Again the detective meditated, but finally said:
 "If you do not suspect what I do, if you have not received a tip, my revelation will be very startling. I've talked with Mrs. Belden about this case."
 "Well?"
 "When I saw you a remarkable fact struck me. You bear a wonderful resemblance to Mrs. Belden. You look enough like her to be her son. She looks enough like you to be your mother. I believe she is your mother. There, that is giving it to you straight. What do you think of it?"
 "I believe you are right."
 "From whom have you received a tip?"
 "From a lady."
 "And the lady is Louise Webster?"
 "No."
 "Who was the lady?"
 "An old lady saw my face. She asked me some strange questions. They were in accord with questions you put to me. I pressed her. She knows Mrs. Belden, and she spoke of my wonderful resemblance to Mrs. Belden."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"AND this woman knows Mrs. Belden?" asked Benson.
 "Yes. She has been in communication with her, and received a letter informing her of Mrs. Belden's intention to start for New York. She was to see her when she arrived."
 "Young man, are you giving me a steer now?"
 "No."
 "Do you mean to tell me Mrs. Belden did not show up?"
 "Mrs. Belden was last heard from when she departed from Chicago."
 "When was she to arrive in New York?"
 "The night that I met the Jersey City veiled woman."
 "Aha! you are keeping something back. Well, all right. We will talk about this new arrival."
 "Mrs. Belden has not arrived in New York."
 "Why are you so sure?"
 "They would not keep mother and son apart."
 "There is something in that."
 Benson was thoughtful a moment, and then remarked:
 "Dick, this has a serious look. I thought Mrs. Belden was in New York. She left San Francisco with a large sum of money in her possession. She must have over a quarter of a million in negotiable government bonds with her."
 "How do you know this?" said Dick, turning pale.
 "She drew these securities from her bank a few days before she left San Francisco. She intended to come on to New York, and has not arrived. She may have been followed."
 "What can we do?"
 "We must trace her."
 "And how about Miss Webster?"
 "Oh, she is all right! You will take good care of her," was the detective's response; and he smiled significantly as he spoke.
 "I see you think I've met Miss Webster."
 "Certainly; but I do not want to meet her."
 "And why do you not want to meet her?"
 "Because I have a warrant for her arrest. I would have to get it countersigned, and hold her for a requisition."
 "You believe her innocent, and if you find her, your duty will demand that you arrest her?"
 "Well?"
 "You do not wish to be compelled to do your duty?"
 "We will let it go that way. Now we must learn something about Mrs. Belden. Have you any clues?"
 "She was recognized or identified on the train that conveyed her to Chicago by the conductor of the train."
 "How do you know this?"
 "From the lady who gave me the information, who has been seeking to solve the mystery of my mother's disappearance."
 "Then you feel certain that Mrs. Belden is your mother, and the mystery of your life has been solved?"
 "No; the mystery is deeper than ever. Only one person can solve it, and she is Mrs. Belden."
 "When will you see the conductor of the train?"
 "To-morrow night."
 "Dick, I think Mrs. Belden did reach New York, and has not made her arrival known."
 "What could have been her reason?"
 "I must have further information before I tell you."
 "How about Bragg running down Miss Webster?"
 "Give him a false steer."
 "Then I will own up. I have told the truth, but I have met Miss Webster, all the same. She is innocent."
 "I believe it."
 "She can prove her innocence if Mrs. Belden is in New York. If anything has happened to my mother"—Dick's voice fell—"she can prove her own innocence."
 Our hero pondered and related the interesting story of his meeting with Miss Webster, and he said:
 "She is very beautiful."
 "Yes. And you see now my conclusions were correct."
 "Now we must see this conductor and shape our course."

The two men separated, and Dick started for his lodgings, and once in his room he sat down and exclaimed:

"Behold what a night will bring forth!"
 The excitement attending all the disclosures he had heard prevented his dwelling upon the wonderful revelations; but when once in his own apartment they came to him in all their force and significance, and he murmured:
 "Have I but learned of my mother only to learn also that she has possibly been the victim of some terrible conspiracy? If I find harm has come to her, woe to the villains at whose hands it may have come!"

On the following day he visited the residence of the aunt of Louise Webster. He was cordially received, and he and the two ladies had a long talk. Our hero was more and more charmed by the loveliness of the lady who was a fugitive, and he determined to see her alone and force from her the story of the robbery. In answer to questions, Dick told how he and the old detective had made up their minds, and were laying their plans to solve the mystery of his mother's disappearance. He learned that the elder lady was a Mrs. Gates, and he did not feel bad when the lady said:

"I will leave you young people alone; I must go out; I have an appointment."

"In relation to my mother?" asked Dick.
 "I will answer your question later on."
 "Leave auntie alone; she knows what to do," said Louise.
 Dick would have pressed further, but was delighted at the idea of being alone with Louise, and said no more. Mrs. Gates went out, and Dick said:

"Now, then, I am going to ask a favor of you."
 "You are determined to take advantage of my aunt's absence?"
 "I want to know all the facts of the robbery."
 "I know nothing about the robbery."
 "How is it you were suspected?"
 "Come; we will talk about something else."
 "You said I could ask any questions."
 "I also said I was not bound to answer them."
 "You know when my mother left California she had a large sum of money with her, and she has not appeared in New York?"
 "That is true."
 "She may have been murdered for her money."
 Dick's voice broke as he spoke.
 "No; I believe she discovered that she was being followed, and she has disappeared in order to throw her pursuers off her track."
 "Who could have followed her?"
 "When you see your mother she will tell you all."
 "How is it you were suspected of the robbery?"
 "I drew suspicion toward myself."
 "For what reason?"
 "Some day you will know the terrible tale."
 "And why do you not tell me?"
 "When you hear the tale you will understand."
 "Is my father living?"
 "It is supposed he is dead."
 "My mother has lived as a widow?"
 "Yes."
 "Then she must have known my father was dead."
 "She supposed so, and yet within a short time there have been developments that make it appear that your father lives."
 "It is strange I can not hear the tale."
 "Your mother is the one who should tell you."
 "You can prove your innocence if my mother is never found?"
 "Yes; I can prove my innocence."
 "My mother shall be found, if living."
 "I am hoping to hear from her every day."
 "Then you do not believe evil has come to her?"
 "I hope not, unless—" Louise Webster stopped.
 "Unless what?" demanded Dick.
 "I can say no more."
 "Why not?"
 The girl shuddered, and in a husky voice added:
 "Do not ask me, it is too terrible."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Dick was unable to gain any information from Louise, and finally left her. That night, in a proper disguise, he was on the lay for the conductor of the train. The man appeared at the appointed place. He walked up and down, but the lady he was to meet did not appear. The man started to walk away, and Dick followed him. At the proper moment, our hero approached, slapped the man on the back, and said:

"Halloo, Tom!"
 The man did not appear at all surprised, but said:
 "You've got the best of me."
 "I've made a mistake. You will pardon me."
 The man looked our hero all over, and then remarked:
 "You did not make a mistake. My name is Tom."
 "That is only a coincidence."
 "As I come to look at you, I think I've seen you before, my friend. But whom did you take me for?"
 "I took you for a conductor that runs the train from Sandoval to Chicago."
 The conductor smiled, and said:
 "I knew I had seen you before. I am the man."
 "Well, well! what are you doing in New York?"
 "Oh! I have a little business here; but let me see: I think I remember seeing you on my train once."
 "When was that?"
 The conductor named the date, and our hero fell to the fact that this same conductor was a pretty shrewd fellow.
 "You must have a pretty good memory for faces!"

"I have."
 "You are surely mistaken; I can prove I have not been away from New York for three months."
 "Then that settles it. You could not have been in Chicago on the —th if you have not been out of New York."
 "That is true; but let me see, there was a lady on your train who came on from St. Louis. She arrived in Chicago?"
 "You're right."
 "What became of her afterward?"
 "How should I know. I do not follow up my passengers."
 "You'd give a good deal to know where she is now."
 "My friend, what are you on to, anyhow? Your meeting with me was not accidental?"
 "No."
 "What's your trick?"
 "You were to meet a lady."
 "Well, suppose I was to meet a lady?"
 "What were you to tell her about your lady-passenger who left St. Louis for Chicago?"
 "You know so much about my business, you must know it all. Who are you?"
 Dick threw back the lapel of his coat and showed his badge, and the conductor ejaculated:
 "Halloo! so you're a cop, eh?"
 "Tell me all you were to tell the lady."
 "I will when the crows sing like a canary bird."
 "Oh, we will understand each other."
 "I hope we will, better than we do now."
 "A lady was to meet you to-night. I am here to represent her."
 "Go it."
 "We are trying to trace a missing lady, and I told my client that if she could get the conductor of the train on to New York, we could run down the whole business."
 "What did you tell her, may I ask?"
 "I may surprise you, my friend."
 "I love to be surprised."
 "I told her this conductor was the guilty man. That he had put up the job."
 "I thought you were smart," said the conductor, coolly, and I see you are a fool."
 "How is that?"
 "You proved it when you told the lady what you did, and I reckon I've no more time to waste with you."
 The conductor started to move away, when Dick said:
 "Hold on, my friend, you are under arrest."
 For the first time the conductor displayed a little nervousness, as he said:
 "On what charge?"
 "I told you of the statement I made to the young lady that when she got the conductor of that train on to New York, she would have the guilty man."
 "Well, you are a fool."
 "That's all right. You are my prisoner."
 "Not yet!"
 "Hold on," said Dick, as he saw the man make a movement as though to draw a weapon. "I've got you covered. I have a partner at hand. You can not come that game."
 "It is nonsense," he said. "I came on her to give information that would lead to the discovery of the lady."
 "Oh, yes! We know all about that. But some one has been here ahead of you."
 "What do you mean by that?"
 "There were others in the conspiracy besides yourself."
 The conductor looked perplexed, and the detective continued:
 "We closed in on one of them. He gave the whole business away. We've got you down fine."
 "See here, mister. Some one is swearing me away."
 "Come out like a man, if you are innocent, and tell me the whole story."
 "Those fellows who were on the train are swearing me away."
 "Tell me all about it."
 "I will. I saw the lady when she boarded my train. She asked me a great many questions, and I was attracted toward her. Later, I saw three very suspicious-looking men who were watching the woman, and I determined to watch them. I lay around and listened to some of their talk, and I made up my mind they were watching the lady with some deep purpose in their minds. I kept my eye on them. The train reached Chicago. I was busy for a few moments, and when I got time to look around the lady had disappeared, and the men also."
 "Were they bad-looking fellows?"
 "Rather loud-appearing men—evidently sports."
 "You would know them if you saw them again?"
 "Every man of them. I've been going around looking for them here in New York."
 "Did the lady take the train for New York?"
 "Yes; on the following morning."
 "How do you know?"
 "I asked the conductor; in fact, I've trailed her all along the road to Philadelphia. There I lost her."
 "Were the men on the train?"
 "Yes."
 "Where did you lose them?"
 "I lost all track of them at Philadelphia; but I have since learned something which makes me think they are in New York."
 "Young fellow, I believe every word you say."
 "That's all right. Then I am not under arrest?"
 "No. Now we must find these men."
 "I think we will run them down."
 "You must make up your mind to remain here until they are found. You shall be paid."

"All I want is pay for my loss of time and my expenses."
 "You shall receive more than that, especially if we run down these men. You are sure you can identify them?"
 "Yes, I am. They can not get under a cover good enough to deceive me."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Do you think the lady was aware that those men were shadowing her?"
 "No."
 "Why didn't you warn her?"
 "I intended to do so at what I considered the proper moment, and in the meantime, as I told you, she disappeared."
 "Is it possible she discovered she was being shadowed, and sought to throw them off the track?"
 "I think not, because she came straight through from Chicago. If she had tried to throw them, she would have laid over, and have changed her course."
 "She possibly did, by going to Philadelphia."
 "No; she laid over at Cleveland, and then took the Erie route. She did not go through on a direct train. She laid over at different points."
 "You said she came straight through, and now say she stopped over."
 "She came straight through practically. Was the lady supposed to have any valuables in her possession?"
 "Yes, she was supposed to have some."
 "Then you can be sure that something has happened."
 "You believe she was murdered?"
 "She may have been abducted. One of the men was a lawyer. They called him Counselor. He appeared to be the leader. He was a respectable-looking man. The other two looked like sports, gamblers, or confidence men."
 "Will you meet me to-morrow at the — Hotel? I can show you around. If we find these men and recover the lady, you shall receive ten thousand dollars."
 "You can depend upon me?"
 "Certainly; we will find these men. I can and will aid you to earn the ten thousand dollars."
 Dick a little later met Benson. To the detective he detailed all that had occurred, and the great detective said:
 "Velvet, you have done it well. We are on the right track."
 "And what do you think?"
 "Find these men, and we will soon know where we stand."
 "One question. Do you believe my mother is dead?"
 "No; she has been abducted for the money and securities she had with her."
 "You believe she lives?"
 "I have no doubt of it. Find those men, and we will find your mother."
 Next morning our hero went to the house of Mrs. Gates. The lady was out, but Miss Webster received him. Dick was charmed when in the presence of the beautiful fugitive. He was under a spell. She appeared more beautiful and charming than ever.
 "What did you learn?" she asked.
 "That my mother was being shadowed at the time she was riding from St. Louis to Chicago."
 "How is it she went to St. Louis?"
 "That is something I can not answer."
 "She could not have come on direct from San Francisco."
 "At any rate, it appears she went to St. Louis."
 "And from St. Louis back to Chicago?"
 "So it would appear."
 "Mrs. Belden must have known she was being followed."
 "That is what I think. The conductor believes differently. But if I find the men, we will soon know. One thing is certain: she arrived in Philadelphia, and from there all trace of her is lost."
 "Do you believe she is dead?"
 "No. A friend has information that he has not imparted to me. He is satisfied that she lives."
 A moment Miss Webster was meditative, and then she said:
 "You will not be offended if I ask you if you need money?"
 "No. And now, good-day. I start on a series of adventures, I am sure."
 When Dick said, "I start on a series of adventures," it would appear that he had a sort of premonition of the dramatic character of the events that were to follow. He met Tom Fearing, the conductor, and the latter said:
 "I've an idea I saw one of the men after I parted from you last night. I started to follow, but he gave me the slip in a most mysterious manner."
 "That would indicate that those men suspected some one was on their track."
 "I did not think of that."
 "They may have recognized you, and seeing you in New York, may have attached some significance to your presence here."
 "You are right. I've been imprudent; I can go under cover now."
 "No; it's just right. We can use you as a decoy duck."
 "By ginger! yes, I see. A good idea."
 "You can go under cover when needed, and appear all right at other times."
 "That is so. And now, what is your programme?"
 "You can go around and show yourself very prominently. I can lay low, and see if any one starts in to watch you."
 "I catch your scheme."
 "That will be our plan for to-day, because from what you say, I am satisfied now those fellows know you are in New York."
 "I have not been as careful as I might have been."

"It may turn out all right and for the best; and now you go, and I will play the shadow. We will arrange a few signals."

Fearing was a bright fellow, and proved an apt scholar. He took to the signals like a school-boy to a pickle, and a little later he started out to play the role of a decoy duck. He went here, there, and everywhere, and some hours later he and our hero met.

"Well, the duck did not draw the flock," said Fearing.

"No."

"What will we do now?"

"We will work another game. You said the men looked like sports? To-night we will work the dens, and to-morrow we will work the tracks."

"Ah! I see you are going the right way to work."

Dick later met Benson, and told of his plan.

"You are doing it right," said the veteran; "and you are bound to win. I thought you had them once."

Dick looked amazed, and the old detective smiled, and said:

"Certainly. I am on hand, and will be when I am needed."

"Ah, I see," said Dick. "It is a good scheme; but you must have struck a splendid cover."

"I am an old hand at that."

"You must be; but I'll tumble the next time."

"Better not try to do so. It will come better as a surprise."

That night Dick met Fearing, and together they sauntered into several dens where the tiger does not roar, but where, in a quiet way he devours his victims all the same. But they did not run across any one whom the latter recognized. Fearing said:

"It's possible the fellows have skipped New York."

"Oh, no. New York is a big city. It sometimes takes a long spell to run down a man here."

"We've been in most of the places, I reckon?"

"No; we've only been in the gilded dens. We will now cross town, and try some of the dens where the trappings are less elegant and the game smaller."

Dick and his friend entered a place on a side street leading from the Bowery.

"Do you see any one?" asked Dick, in a whisper.

Fearing tipped back a caution. He had his eyes fixed on one man who stood talking with a stylish-looking chap across the room. Dick's attention wandered over in the same direction, and he heard one of the men say:

"Nesbitt is laying pretty low lately."

"He and Frenchy have been on some big scheme. They are full of money, and don't show up among the boys lately. They are running a swell season."

The man who asked the question looked thoughtful. He was a shrewd-faced fellow—a determined-looking man—and he said:

"I'd like to meet 'em."

"If you attend the races, you'll catch 'em. They're full of money, and they are playing big games on the horses."

"Where do they hang out in the city?"

"At How's, I think."

How's was a place, as Dick recognized, where only men were admitted who were well known, and who played for big money, and some of the most prominent men in the city were wont to meet there.

The man was thoughtful again, and then said:

"I reckon I'll take a walk up to How's."

"Have you the *entree*?"

"That's all right; but the men owe me money. I staked them, and now they go back on me. Well, we'll see about those fakes."

"We will go to How's, and see some fun," said Dick, as he and Fearing left the place.

CHAPTER XXIX.

We will here state that the names mentioned by the two men were names that Fearing had heard exchanged between the men who were shadowing the lady who arrived on the train from St. Louis on the conductor's run.

"We will find our man. Did you hear what he said?"

"That Nesbitt and Frenchy had been in a big scheme and were full of money?"

"We are on to those rascals."

"I think we are."

Our hero felt a cold chill running through his heart. There came a terrible suggestion with the words he had overheard. They were following the man who was going to How's. They saw him suddenly dodge into a notorious drinking-place. Two men had entered ahead of him. Dick and Fearing followed in. Two men stood at the bar, and in an excited whisper Fearing said:

"There they are. The men I saw on the train."

Dick looked the fellows over, and then he felt Fearing nudge at his shoulder. Our hero glanced in the direction indicated by the conductor. He saw the man whom they had shadowed seated at a table; his eyes, glowing with a bright gleam, were fixed on Nesbitt and Frenchy. The two men appeared to be quite jubilant over something. Suddenly the man who had been watching them arose, approached the two, and said:

"Halloo, Nesbitt!"

The man addressed stared superciliously at the speaker.

"I reckon you've made a mistake. My name is not Nesbitt."

"How long since you changed it? And I suppose your pal's name is not French?"

"I beg pardon!" exclaimed French. "You're away off, my friend. My name is not French. I am not a Frenchy. I am a good Yankee."

"So you've changed your name, eh?"

"No, sir; you are laboring under a great mistake."

"Then neither one of you gentlemen really recognize me?"

"My friend, we never saw you before."

There was blood in the eye of the man. Our hero saw there was going to be a fracas, and he was ready to jump in at the right moment.

"Step this way, will you?" said the man with the fierce look.

"You are laboring under an hallucination."

"That is a big word for you, Frenchy. You had better put it in a cage, or it will fly away."

"You are very funny, my friend."

"Am I?"

"You are—you are."

The last words were spoken in that peculiar and jocose manner used upon the stage in the play of impulse.

"You're very funny," said the man. "My name is Phinney."

"Mr. Phinney, we are glad to make your acquaintance. We are only sorry we never met you before."

"What two dudes you fellows are getting to be," said Phinney.

"Arthur," said French, "we must go. This good man seems to have mistaken us for some one else."

"Are you fellows joking?" came the question.

"Well, you are funny, you are—you are."

"Oh, come off!"

"You certainly are laboring under a great misapprehension."

"Put that word in the cage with the other one. But see here, lads, if you fellows are enjoying yourselves, all right. If you are trying to give me the shake, why, I say come off, that's all."

"No; we never saw you. But you are—you are."

"You know me. You've been in a big scheme lately."

The two men addressed started and glared at each other, and the man Phinney proceeded, and said:

"You're full of money now, and you must pay me."

"My friend, you're mad."

"Am I?"

"You are—you are," chimed in French.

"You two are a pair of fakes, you are—you are," said Phinney, imitating the tone of the joker French.

"We can not permit you to talk to us in that way, even though you are laboring under a sad mistake."

"It's not a sad mistake. It's good luck meeting you fellows. You know me; you know what you owe me, and you will settle."

"You are going a little too far, my friend," said Nesbitt, in a fierce tone.

"I am, eh?"

"You are—you are," chimed in French.

"I'll go further. I'm onto your game. And now, see here. You fellows will settle with me, or I squeak and identify you; and then where will you be?"

The two fellows seemed as though they would drop down from their perch; but Nesbitt appeared to think matters over rapidly, and said:

"You claim we owe you money?"

"That's what I claim."

"If we don't settle, you'll squeak?"

"Yes; that's what I said."

Nesbitt suddenly shot forth his hand; but the man assailed was quick enough to dodge, and the men had a run in. Dick leaped forward and seized one man, and another gentleman present also interfered. The two combatants were pulled apart, but both indulged in wild threats and declarations that were pie to our hero. Nesbitt drew a pistol; but it was taken from him, and his friend French hustled him from the place. Dick did not follow. He desired time to think matters over and decide upon his course.

When he and Fearing were once again on the street, the conductor said:

"You heard what the man Phinney said and you take in what it all means?"

"I do."

"And what is your course of action?"

"We will follow those men."

Dick and Fearing did start in to follow the men, but they were left. Nesbitt and French had disappeared, and it was agreed that they would fall to the shadow on the following day.

Next morning Dick appeared at the home of Miss Webster's aunt. He met the ladies, and in answer to their questions told them as much as he thought necessary, and said:

"I will have something to report when the day is over."

Later our hero met Fearing, and that same afternoon appeared at the race track. Dick had adopted a suitable disguise, and had arranged for several of his magical changes.

In our opening chapters we detailed how Dick came upon Nesbitt and French. We related also the conversation that passed between them, and he then disappeared. A little later he met Fearing, who was also under a disguise—Dick had attended to that part of it.

"Well, did you get on to them?" asked Dick.

"I did."

"How did they take things?" asked our hero.

"They were considerably worked up."

Dick related the conversation he had overheard between the two men, and especially the talk concerning the man Brown.

"Who is this man Brown?" asked Dick.

"In my opinion he is the arch-fiend. It is evident Nesbitt and French are merely paid men. He is the lawyer who instigated the whole business."

"We must find this man Brown."

Dick and Fearing returned to New York. He met Benson and related all that had occurred, and the veteran detective said:

"We are forging down on their lines. What we want now is to locate this man Brown. He is the arch-fiend in the matter, you say?"

"Yes."

"All right. I've no instructions to give. Lay low and locate

Brown, then report. When we find this fellow, we will close in pretty rapidly, I reckon."

That night, in a new disguise, Dick was on the street going it alone. He had arranged to have Fearing at hand if he needed him. Luck favored Dick. He ran upon the two men, and he could see that they were rather nervous and excited. They proceeded to a hotel. Dick followed them. He saw them go to the office and send up their cards. A few moments passed, and an answer was brought to them. They went away, and Dick followed, and he muttered:

"I am on to them now. I will cage Brown in an hour or I'm dumb."

The two men went to an obscure beer saloon in an out-of-the-way place. Dick was a linguist. He had been educated on the Continent. He possessed a natural deftness for the acquirement of languages; spoke several fluently, and among others, German.

He worked a change and followed the men into the saloon. They were just being served with their beer. Dick called for lager, speaking in German. The keeper of the place carried him the beer and engaged in conversation with him in German, and only left him when a new customer entered. Our hero was well got up, and his German lingo aided his disguise. The two men paid no attention to him. They were engaged in an earnest conversation, and Dick overheard all they said. They spoke in low tones, but he had ears like a mouse.

"Brown was ugly," said French. "I could read it in the peremptory message he sent us."

"But we can make him come down, or give things away."

CHAPTER XXX.

Dick was delighted at the turn the affair was taking. He discerned the whole business. Brown was seeking to get rid of his two confederates, and the men were aware of his intention.

"I don't like it that he does not receive us in his room."

"It does not make any difference. We will see him here."

"There was money on the woman."

"You bet! but he has it all."

"We can secure possession of the woman, and make an arrangement with her, and force him to disgorge."

Dick heard these words, and his heart beat fast. He knew that his mother lived, that she was possibly a prisoner. But he was on the track of the scoundrels, and could soon release her. There was no mistaking the words. "We can get possession of the woman." There would be no need of getting possession of the dead. The words meant that his mother lived. A glow ran through his heart, but a moment later there came an icy coldness. His assurance in one direction was followed by a doubt.

"That would be all right," said French, "if we were sure that the woman is alive."

"Would he gain anything by her murder?"

"Dead women, as well as dead men, tell no tales. That was the old piratical doctrine."

"He is deep, and may have all his plans arranged to drop us out."

"No doubt. But I've made arrangements also. We've got him in one way. The moment a word is dropped about the woman her friends will raise a row that will ring throughout this country."

"How is it that that row has not been already raised?"

"It is not known that she is missing. She left San Francisco secretly. She desired to conceal her movements, and thus fell into the trap."

"Nesbitt, we may make some money out of this, after all. I've an idea. Suppose we squeak?"

"There's not enough in it. We would only get a reward."

"Well?"

"If we get the woman, we can get it all."

"What can we do?"

"Brown would drop us out. He would have us put away. Suppose we put him away?"

At that instant a man entered the bar room and glanced furtively around. The man, as Dick detected at a glance, was under a disguise. The moment the stranger's eyes fell upon the two men, he advanced and took a seat at the table with them, and our hero sat innocently sipping his beer.

"Ah! you've come."

"Yes, I am here."

Nesbitt's tones were sharp, and the man's tones in answering were even sharper.

"What do you fellows want, anyhow?"

"We want money."

"Haven't you fellows blackmailed me enough?"

"Oh! that's your game."

"Here you are, two rascals whom I detected in a wicked scheme. I threatened you, and now you've started in to blackmail me. Listen. Your game won't work. You are two State prison birds. There is a reward offered for you. Now all I've got to do is speak and you're gone."

"If you speak, we can halloo. This game is not all one way."

"So you threaten me?"

"Certainly we do. If we're State prison birds, what are you? What did you have to do with a certain robbery and attempted murder?"

"I am willing to help you on one condition."

"Let's hear your proposition."

"I will give you fellows two thousand a piece the moment I see you off at Sandy Hook."

"That's your game? We don't accept your offer. We want ten thousand."

"You're smart fellows."

"You know well enough; and we can put ourselves in communication with the friends of the lady."

"I am already in communication, and in a few hours the friends of the lady will be looking for you. I've been too deep for you fellows. The lady looks upon me as her rescuer. She is full of thankfulness. She has returned to her friends, and I have been paid my reward. Now, what will you rascals do?"

The two men looked in each other's eyes. There was reason to believe that the man told the truth; and, if he did, their case was no good; he had 'em foul.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THERE followed a moment's silence. There was a glitter of triumph in the eyes of Brown, and the two men looked greatly discomfited.

"You fellows were wrong all through," said Brown. "I pretended I wanted you to do a criminal act. You were only performing an act of mercy. I am the friend of the woman. I was protecting her against a real enemy; but you fellows did not know it when you were aiding me."

"And you drop us out, eh?"

"Not entirely. I will see you in a few days and talk matters over. The lady is very grateful, and may be willing to give you each a good reward, under conditions. And now I will bid you chaps good night. But do not attempt to blackmail me, or I am done with you."

"When will we see you again?"

"In a few days."

Brown rose, and without another word departed.

Our hero knew where to find Brown, so he thought he would lay low and listen to what the two men had to say. After the man had gone, French said:

"We know he is a villain and a murderer. He is up to a game. We will play against him, and between you and me, we will get possession of the lady."

"How can we?"

"She is in New York and Brown visits her."

"That is possible."

"We can lay for Brown. I tell you there is a big scheme on hand. That fellow who fooled us at the track is in with Brown."

"You do not give up?"

"No. I'll make Brown crawl before I get through with him. I know where he hangs out."

Nesbitt named a place, and our hero made a mental note of it.

"We will find that woman. He has never communicated with her friends, and there is only one thing I fear—that she is dead."

Dick felt a twinge. Nesbitt was high authority, but dead or alive, he was on the sure road for the solution of the mystery. The two men left the saloon, and a few moments later our hero left also. He returned to Broadway, and was walking along, when he met the man Brown, and started in to follow him. He hoped to get in ahead of Nesbitt and trail the man to the house, and he muttered:

"Who knows what this night may yet develop?"

Brown walked along and entered a house just off of Broadway, and Dick's heart beat. He revolved in his mind an excuse for entering the house; and he was walking up and down on the opposite side of the street, when a man approached, eyed him closely, and finally, stepping forward, said:

"You were following a man who entered that house. Do you know the man?"

Dick was taken all aback. He did not grasp what the question might mean, and he did not know just how to answer it.

"I do not know who you are."

The man stood under the glare of a street lamp. He had a very striking face. He was a handsome man, not more than forty five, and he appeared to be laboring under restrained excitement. Dick was interested at once, and he said:

"I know something of the man."

"Is his name King?"

"No."

The stranger was thoughtful a moment, and then said in a strange tone:

"Let me see your face."

"Why do you wish to see my face?"

"I wish to learn whether you speak the truth or not."

Dick knew he had struck a character, or a man who was playing a part. But it was in his line to humor him. He stepped under the full glare of the street lamp, and his face was exposed. Dick's face was only slightly disguised; and after looking at the face of our hero for a moment in the most intense manner, the stranger said:

"There is something familiar in the lines of your face, and it seems as though I had known you in the past. What is your age?"

Dick named his age, and after a moment's thought, the stranger said:

"I could never have known you. It must be that I knew some one who resembled you."

"Your actions are strange, your questions are stranger, sir."

"You do not think me mad?"

"No."

"I never was mad."

The stranger appeared to be speaking to himself, and a most strange and startling suspicion flashed through our hero's mind.

"You think there is something familiar in my face? You do not recall where you ever saw me?"

"It seems to me that at some time I must have known some one whom you now resemble."

Dick remembered his disguise. He turned away a moment and then facing the stranger, asked:

"Do you recall now?"

The stranger uttered a cry. His eyes started. He glared like a man suddenly stricken with madness. The effect upon him was startling. His excitement was so great he could not speak. He would have fallen had not Dick reached out and grasped his arm. Finally the stranger gasped:

"Who are you? Ah, can it be? Do I dream, or am I mad? Speak. What is your name?"

"Calm yourself, my friend. But do you recall now whom I resemble?"

"I can not tell you until I know more. What is your name?"

"I can not tell you, sir, until I know more. Your actions are very strange. You act like a man who is not all right here." Dick tapped his head.

"I'm all right; but you do not understand."

"Let us talk matters over. Your words require an explanation."

"I must not lose sight of that man. I have looked too long for him."

"Suppose he is King?"

"I will kill him on sight."

Dick was forced to conclude that the stranger was an escaped lunatic. No sane man would so boldly confessed a determination to commit a murder.

"Why should you kill him?"

The stranger meditated a moment, and then said:

"You would kill him, too, if you knew the truth."

These ambiguous words only the more excited Dick's curiosity, and agitated a growing suspicion that was arising in his mind.

"We must have a talk. Your wild words need explanation."

"That is true; but I must watch for that man."

"I can tell you all about that man, and I can find him for you any time you wish to see him."

"I have found him. I can find you any time. I would like to clasp you in my arms, young man. I have a most startling revelation to make."

"Make it."

"No, no; not now. I may be wrong; but that man can aid me. You and I will see him together."

"But how can he aid you if you kill him?"

"I will force the truth from him first."

"You had better make the revelation first."

"We will wait for that. We will seize him. I will put you face to face with him, and ask him who you are. He can tell me."

"No; he never saw me to know me in his life."

"So much the better. You will appear as a ghost to him."

These were certainly strange words. Our hero would have thought him a lunatic but for one fact. This one fact had led to many strange revelations, and a wild, weird suspicion was running through our hero's mind, and he said:

"Come, my friend, let us go away together."

"But that man?"

"He will be in that house some time. We can come back and waylay him."

"And I will kill him."

"After we have talked you will change your mind."

"I am weak, my young friend—yes, I am weak. If you knew all, you would understand it."

"I think I know all. You said you would make a revelation to me. I think I can make a startling revelation to you, sir."

"Tell me what you suspect."

"I will if you come with me, sir."

CHAPTER XXXII

"I will never forgive myself if I lose sight of that man."

"I promise that you shall not lose sight of him."

"Where would you take me?"

"To a place where we can sit down and calmly talk matters over."

Dick could see that the gentleman was lacking in mental strength. He was like a man brain weary, very forgetful.

"I will go with you," said the stranger, finally; and Dick led him away. They went to a hotel.

When once seated in a room in the hotel, Dick said:

"Now we will come to a full revelation. You say I resemble some one whom you once knew? Name him."

"She is dead."

"Then it is a lady whom I resemble?"

"You resemble a lady whom I once knew."

"And that lady was your wife?"

The man started, glared at Dick, and said:

"What put that suspicion in your mind?"

"The lady was not your wife?"

"No."

"Was she a relative of yours?"

The man did not answer. Dick repeated his question, but the man seemed to have suddenly resolved to maintain silence, and nothing that our hero could say would induce him to give any information concerning himself. At length the young detective determined upon a new plan, and was about to tell his own story, when the stranger rose from his seat, saying:

"I will listen in one moment."

He left the room. Dick did not detain him. He started to follow, but the man had most mysteriously disappeared.

"Well, well, that man is crazy. And, after all, I reckon I was losing time with him."

Our hero had a lurking suspicion that he would find the stranger in front of the house he had seen Brown enter, and he also left the hotel and proceeded to the spot where he had first been accosted by the eccentric stranger. He looked around in every direction, but the man was not to be seen. He feared the man Brown might have

followed him; and remembering the man's words, Dick feared a homicide. A moment later, however, these fears were allayed, for he saw Brown leave the house; and the detective followed him for the purpose of preventing a murder. Brown went straight to his house. On the route, and when in a dark street, he dropped his disguise. Dick hung around for some time, thinking his eccentric friend might pop up. He did not put in an appearance, however, and our detective returned to the vicinity of the house, and watched it a long time. It was just midnight, and he had determined to lay low and accost the policeman on that particular beat, and ask him some questions concerning the occupants of the house; but while awaiting the appearance of the cop, a man came down the street. He looked closely at every house as he passed along, and when he came opposite the house our hero was watching, he came to a halt. Dick observed that he was making a very close examination, and taking in all the bearings.

"What does this mean?" Dick muttered, as the man looked up and down the street in a strange and inquiring manner.

A moment later our hero saw a cop approaching. He expected to see the man dodge out of sight, but when the cop approached, the fellow whom Dick had been watching accosted the officer, and the two walked off up the street together.

"Well, this gets me," was our hero's remark.

There was a light still burning in the house. A woman appeared at the window, and peered out as though looking for some one. When our hero beheld the figure of the woman, he strained his glance to see if he could discern the outline of her features. There were reasons why he thought he could recognize her in case his startling suspicions were correct. He could not see the woman's face plainly enough to reach any conclusion, and she disappeared from the window.

"I will see that face at all hazards," was Dick's exclamation.

While undetermined as to just what he would do, he saw the man return who had been taking the bearings of the house. The man returned alone.

"There's something up here," was Dick's observation.

Again the man made a close study of the house, and while he was so doing, the figure of the woman again appeared at the window. Dick forgot about the man. Again his gaze was riveted on the figure of the woman. She only remained at the window an instant, and then again disappeared. Our hero looked around again to watch his man, but, alas! the fellow had disappeared. The detective was startled, and he ejaculated:

"Halloo! where has he gone?"

He could not see the fellow going either up or down the street, and he could not have vanished in thin air. The detective was puzzled. He had only lost sight of the man for one minute and yet during that one minute the man had disappeared in the most singular manner. Suddenly an idea came to him, and he ejaculated:

"By ginger!"

As he uttered the ejaculation, he walked across the street. He entered the court-yard of the house, glanced in the area way leading to the lower basement door, and lo! the mystery was partially solved. The iron gate was partly open. Dick advanced and peeped in. He saw no one. A moment he waited, and then descended the steps. He tried the basement door. It was open. The man had surely entered the house by trick and device.

Our hero was a brave and adventurous spirit; he entered the house and closed the basement door behind him. He then removed his shoes, laid them where he could recover them at the proper moment, and stealthily ascended the stairs to the parlor floor. He did not wish to come upon the man in the darkness unawares. There appeared to be no one moving in the lower part of the house. Dick ascended part way the parlor stairs and suddenly he saw a flash of light that revealed the figure of a man, who held a dark lantern. He had flashed its gleam upon the door opening into the front room of the second floor of the house.

"I have him located," was our hero's mental conclusion.

A few moments passed, and there came a sudden flood of light, such as would come through the open door of a well lighted room, reflecting out on a dark hall.

"Aha!" muttered the detective, "he has entered the room."

Our hero heard an exclamation of surprise and alarm as the door closed. The detective dashed up the stairs swiftly but noiselessly. He stood opposite the door, knelt down and peeped in, and a very startling and striking tableau was presented. A very handsome young woman stood near a table, and between her and the door stood the man whom our hero had been shadowing. Dick had expected to recognize the eccentric hero of the night's incidents, but it was not he, it was not Nesbitt or French.

"Who are you? How dare you enter this house?"

"I can tell you who I am, and I can give good reasons for entering this house."

"You have made a mistake."

"It is possible I have, Miss Belden."

At the name Belden, the lady did betray emotion.

Dick was amazed and puzzled. The lady was not the one he had feared and yet hoped to behold. She was too young by many years. Her emotion perplexed him, and it appeared to please the man.

"You do not answer to the name of Belden?"

"I do not."

"Then I will admit I made a mistake, and say I am here to see Miss Louise Webster."

Again a shade of emotion passed over the lady's face; but she was not as excited as when first addressed as Miss Belden.

"Come, miss, let's sit down, and talk matters over."

The lady appeared to meditate a moment, and did sit down, and asked the intruder to sit down also, and the man said:

"Now you show good sense. You see I've got you dead to rights, and you know why I am here."

The lady smiled, she had entirely recovered her self-possession. "I do not know why you are here, and I am greatly amused; if I were not, I should summon help and have you handed over to the police. I am curious and willing, despite the singular circumstances of our meeting, to listen to you."

"How kind! And you confess you are Miss Louise Webster?"

"Well, it is very amusing; but go on. Consider I have confessed that I am Miss Webster; and now what have you to say?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE conversation was becoming quite interesting to the detective. "You are the coolest woman I ever met; but you will have to come down—yes, you will, or I will be compelled to do my duty." The woman laughed right out.

"Oh, you can't throw me off the scent that way. You are Louise Webster. I do not want to make an arrest. I will give you a chance to get away, on one condition: hand over the swag." Again the woman laughed in a merry manner, and said:

"If I am innocent, how can I have any swag, as you call it?"

"You robbed your late guardian, Mr. Belden."

"My dear sir, if I ever did do such a wicked thing, I have certainly forgotten all about it."

Dick had identified the man as Louis Bragg, the California detective. Our hero also knew that Bragg was on the wrong scent. But the question arose: who was the lady? She was certainly identified with the affair, for the man Brown had visited her; then how was it that Bragg had concluded she was Miss Webster? He must have some indices.

"I am an officer."

"So I supposed, and that is why I was not so greatly scared as I might have been. Let me tell you, you are laboring under a great mistake. I am not Miss Webster. I will go to head-quarters with you and prove my identity. I know nothing about the parties or the robbery you are talking about. The whole matter is an enigma to me."

"Will you go now to head quarters and prove your identity?"

"If you desire me to do so."

Bragg was evidently taken aback. Meantime, our hero prepared for certain contingencies by working one of his magical transformations. He calculated he might be called upon to make a break and enter that room.

"I will prove your identity without your aid."

"As you chose: but I am entitled to know what led to your mistake, in order to guard against future annoyances."

"After I am satisfied that I have made a mistake, I will call upon you to-morrow and explain."

"I shall expect you at ten o'clock."

"In case I have made a mistake, I will ask your pardon now."

"My pardon will not be granted until I learn what led to your mistake."

The detective rose, and our hero darted down the stairs, and putting on his shoes, quickly left the house, and a few moments later Bragg came forth. Dick approached him, laid his hand upon his shoulder, and demanded:

"Where did you come from?"

"Scout of your business."

"You will see it is some of my business."

Dick showed his badge, when Bragg also threw back the lapel of his coat and displayed a badge.

"Aha! so you are an officer? What's your lay?"

Bragg hesitated a moment, and then said:

"I'll tell you, as possibly you can help me."

Dick wished to learn why Bragg suspected her to be Louise Webster. He also wished to use Bragg's appointment with her in furtherance of a scheme of his own. In answer to several questions, Dick learned that Bragg was in search of a certain criminal, and he had been led to suspect the identity of the woman. After several dodges and evasions on Bragg's part, our hero surprised him by saying:

"I can tell you the woman is not Louise Webster."

"She is not? But who are you?"

"I am Dick Velsor."

"Well I'll be hanged! What are you doing around here?"

"I've been shadowing that woman."

"And what have you made out?"

"She is not Louise Webster, but I've an idea that she knows something about the case we are working up."

"Then I am not altogether off the track, after all?"

"No; but how came you to get on to her track?"

"I met a man whom I've often seen in San Francisco. After shadowing him, I came to the conclusion there was something strange in his actions. I tracked him to this house, and then I kept a watch of the house. I became satisfied there was a woman in the house who was keeping herself concealed. I made up my mind to interview her, and did so to-night."

"And what are your conclusions?"

"She convinced me that she was not Louise Webster."

"No; she is not Louise Webster; but I will tell you frankly, I believe she possesses information that will prove very important to you and me."

"In what direction?"

"We will talk that over later on. Let's go away and arrange matters. Let her rest to-night; but you are on a big shadow."

The two men retired to a convenient place, and sitting down, talked the matter over.

"You say I am on a bigger shadow than I dream?"

"Did you know Miss Belden, the daughter of the man who was robbed, started for New York and never reached here?"

"What has become of her?"

"That is what we are trying to find out. She had a large sum

of money with her, and the chances are she was robbed and murdered, or possibly abducted, and you are on to the trail."

"How is that?"

"The man you recognized from California is a fellow named Brown. He is in some way connected with the affair. We were trailing for him. You shadowed him to that house; to you belongs the credit. That woman knows something, and now it is for you and I to make her open up and tell all she knows."

"What is your plan?"

Dick opened up his plan. It was an ingenious one, and there was a possibility of not only wonderful developments, but the most strange and startling surprises.

"I am in with you," said Bragg.

Dick had misled his comrade as to his real intentions, but he looked forward to a very thrilling scene and most startling development.

When Bragg left the presence of the woman, there came over her face a pallid expression, and she walked the floor to and fro for a few moments, and then, throwing herself upon a seat, said:

"I must take the risk; I must see him to-night. My adventure means something terrible!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ABOUT an hour following Bragg's interview with the woman into whose presence he had stolen, and while the two detectives were talking matters over, a woman was talking with a man in a room in a hotel. Upon her entrance, the man had exclaimed:

"What! you here? What has happened?"

The woman related all that had occurred. When the narrative was concluded, the man said in a grave tone:

"Did he really suspect you of being Louise Webster?"

"I think he did."

"The man must have known Louise Webster; he would see at a glance that you were not the lady. You do not look at all like her."

"She is beautiful, they say."

"Ah, yes, you are both very beautiful; but your beauty is of a different type. It was not a mistake—it was a blind."

"And what does it mean?"

There came a glitter in the man's eyes as he remarked:

"I think I know. Describe your visitor."

The woman did so, and Brown said meditatively:

"It does not answer the description of either man, but he may have been under a disguise."

"He is to visit me to-morrow."

"Under what pretense?"

"After satisfying himself that I am not Louise Webster."

The man was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"If he really is a detective it has a bad look, and some one has betrayed me—some one has shadowed me to your house. I should have been more careful."

"I will return now, and to-morrow meet this man, unless you order differently."

"You must meet him. I will be at your house, and I will be prepared."

Next morning Brown appeared at the lady's house. He was very much excited, and evidently laboring under great apprehension. The woman, on the contrary, was cool. Brown paced the floor ever and anon, giving utterance to all sorts of mutterings. He had been around bright and early. He had moved around under a disguise. He had shadowed certain men, and the results were so far very unsatisfactory. The hour of ten approached. Brown was still under a disguise. He drew a pistol from his pocket, and carefully examined it. The woman eyed him, and said:

"You must not provoke a tragedy in this house."

"Certainly not; but suppose they should attempt to arrest you?"

"Let them do it."

"Suppose this man should attempt an insult? We do not know who he is or his purpose. The whole affair may be a conspiracy."

"Then leave it to me to take care of myself."

"I have thought of a plan. You can lead the conversation so as to demand the right to introduce your father into the room."

The man Brown mapped out a plan of action, and the woman said:

"It may be you he is after."

"He will not recognize me, and our plan will give me a chance to give him a false steer."

"Well, it's your chance now; for the man has arrived."

A servant brought a card, and stated that a gentleman and lady were waiting in the parlor.

"A gentleman and lady!" exclaimed Brown; and he added, "You did not tell me about the lady."

"I did not know about the lady."

"I have an idea. Let me go and meet these people. I will introduce myself as your father. As the head of this house, I can force an explanation by demanding to know how that fellow dared enter my house surreptitiously."

"It is your matter. Do as you choose."

Brown had got himself up as an elderly man. He just worked a trilling transform, then descended to the parlor. He walked in boldly, and there sat Bragg and a veiled lady.

"Excuse me," he said. "My daughter has sent me to meet you."

"Well, sir, what word does your daughter send?"

"No word. I desire to know what all this means: your forcing yourself into my house at midnight, seeking to abash my child by accusing her of being another woman. I believe you claim to be an officer. If you are, you are certainly a very rash one. Had I yielded to my first incitement, I should have had the chief here; but I determined to first permit you to offer an explanation."

Bragg was taken a little aback. He did not recognize Brown under his disguise. The lady accompanying him, however, did.

"I was in the way of duty," said Bragg.

"I can not see how the way of duty led you into a private gentlemen's house at midnight unbidden. The whole affair is an outrage upon a citizen's privacy. You are liable to severe punishment, and unless I receive a satisfactory explanation, I shall see that you are punished."

"I am detailed to shadow down a certain lady."

"And why do you come here?"

The veiled lady managed to convey a signal to Bragg, who understood, and he said:

"I am willing to give all the explanations necessary; but first I want you, sir, to answer a few questions."

"I shall not answer any questions until I have heard your explanation."

"Oh, yes, you will. You claim to be the young lady's father?"

"I do."

"Then, sir, you also come under suspicion."

"And do you dare to tell me my daughter is under suspicion?"

"I do."

"What suspicion can she be under, as she tells me you took her to be another party. I understand you mistook my daughter for some person named Webster. My daughter is not a Miss Webster, and you know it."

"I did intimate that your daughter was a Miss Webster."

"And now you know differently?"

"I knew it then."

The man Brown looked a little confused.

"If you knew it then, what was your purpose?"

"Merely a blind, sir."

"Then what am I to understand?"

"I said I was trying to shadow down a woman. That was a blind also."

"Will you explain just what you do mean?"

"I am shadowing a man."

"What has my daughter to do with your shadowing of a man?"

"You claim to be her father?"

"I do."

"Then, sir, I think you are the man I am shadowing."

The man stared in amazement, and Bragg said:

"You see I am coming down to explanations."

There followed a moment's silence. The man Brown had changed his tone a trifle. He was very confident at the first.

"You say you are not here for fun?" at length said Brown.

"Then you are here for business. What is your business?"

"I will tell you when I know who you are."

"I told you I claimed to be the father of the lady."

"You're fooling. And now, sir, in plain language, who are you?—not whom do you claim to be—but who are you?"

"None of your business," came the answer in a savage tone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BRAGG laughed. During the whole talk, the man Brown had kept his eyes fixed on the veiled lady. She had not said one word. After the man's savage declaration, Bragg said:

"If it is none of my business, possibly it may be the business of this lady."

Brown started and stared, and demanded:

"Who is the lady?"

The veiled lady at once said:

"Do you know a man named Nesbitt?"

"I know him. A villainous fellow capable of any crime."

"And do you know a man named French?"

"I do."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"The same sort of scamp as the man Nesbitt. They are two mean rascals, capable of any villainy."

"Do you know a man named Brown?" came the startling question.

The man's face became ghastly, his excitement was illy concealed, but he answered:

"I do not."

"Strange you should know Nesbitt and French and not Brown."

"I do not very well know the two men you have named."

"You appeared to know them well enough to denounce them as villains capable of any villainy."

"I only know them by reputation."

Brown had jumped to the conclusion that the two men were at the bottom of some scheme; but the abrupt question as to his acquaintance with Brown rather took him aback. He was perplexed and confused.

"You certainly must know Mr. Brown."

"If you will tell me why you ask—"

"I have reason to believe that the man Brown is a bigger rascal than the two men named, whom you admit you do know."

"Will you explain to me, madame, why this matter, or, rather, these men are brought to my attention?"

"I will. It has been discovered that you in some way have been connected with them."

The man's eyes flashed, and his face grew even more pallid, as he said:

"And how dare you make that declaration? If these men have given you any information that led you to come to me, they are only seeking to throw you off the track in some way."

"I got no information from those men. It is the man Brown I am after, and as you have been in close connection with those men you may know Brown, that is all."

"Why don't you get informed about Brown from them?"

"You were with those men last night."

The man was silent a moment, and then said:

"I was with those men. I have been seeking to get certain information from them, and that is how I learned they were villains."

"It is possible we are seeking the same information."

"What information are you seeking?"

"I want to find the man Brown, and I think you can give me the information I need if you choose."

"Madame, then we are on the same trail. I am seeking this man Brown, and that is why I met these two men."

"And why did they demand money from you?"

"Ah, I see now. You are in collusion with these men. They are playing a return game on me."

"A lady started from California. She had money and other valuables in her possession. A man named Brown followed her and robbed her. His aids were Nesbitt and French. Now then you know why I seek Brown."

The face of Brown was a study; he squirmed like a wounded snake, so great was his distress. He appeared to have lost his power of speech; at length he managed to articulate in a husky voice:

"Why do you come to me?"

"Because you are Brown," was the answer.

Our hero had still another surprise for the man—one that in its startling character was bound to produce results. There followed a moment's silence. Dick and Bragg exchanged glances, and those glances intimated: "We've got him sure."

After a long interval, the man Brown attempted to laugh; but the attempt was not a success, and Dick said:

"You dare not deny your identity."

The man had, to a certain extent, recovered from the first shock, and he said:

"It is ridiculous. I am not Brown."

"That is possible. And yet you are the man I seek."

"I do not know what your design is; but you will pay severely for this series of tricks you have been playing upon me."

"I charge you with being a robber—possibly a murderer. I demand a return of the stolen property, and you will surrender it."

"I have nothing to return."

"Nesbitt and French are in custody."

"Aha! I see it all; now I will make an explanation. I learned that those men had a scheme in hand to follow and rob a lady. I pretended to friendship with them, and by so doing defeated their scheme, and now I see, in order to save themselves, they have turned against me."

"You say you defeated them, prevented the lady from being robbed, and you rescued her out of their hands?"

"I did."

"Then you have the property?"

"No."

"Who has it?"

"I restored it to the lady."

"If you can prove this, you are a fortunate man."

"I can prove it."

"Where is the lady?"

"I do not know."

"That is strange."

"There is nothing strange about it. I saved the lady's life. I saved her property; she thanked me, and offered to reward me. The thanks I deserved, and accepted; the reward I did not need, and declined it."

"And the lady?"

"I know nothing about her."

"Where did you see her last?"

"In Chicago."

"By whom can you prove all you say?"

"The lady."

"But you say you do not know where she is now."

"If she learns I am in trouble, because of my kindness to her, she will come forward and exonerate me."

"How do you know that the lady herself is not your accuser?"

"I know she is not."

"You are absolutely confident on that point?"

"I am."

"It's strange, because the lady is your accuser."

"She is not. It is impossible. I know she is not."

"Then you must know where she is."

"I can communicate with her if it becomes necessary."

There was a moment's silence, and then the veiled woman raised her veil, and said in a dramatic tone:

"She is here!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE effect upon the man when he gazed upon that face can not be described. He was like one stricken with death. There was surprise, horror, and terror; and he sat speechless, and powerless to move. Bragg and our hero exchanged glances. The effect upon the man told its own tale. If our hero resembled the missing lady when he stood before her acquaintances as a man, how much more striking must it have been when he was disguised as a woman? It was evident he mistook our hero for the missing lady, and our hero knew he had trailed down close to the place of concealment of her whom, with such a trembling and agitated heart, he sought.

At length our hero said in a steady voice:

"What have you to say now?"

The man was silent a moment, and then said:

"I have not found your friends; I promised to bring them to you when I did."

Here was the absolute confession our hero sought.

"Yes, you promised to bring them to me; but I now know you are a villain and a robber."

"Oh, no—no, it's false; I was true and faithful to you."

Dick was a quick thinker. The answer he received proved his supposition to be correct; his mother lived, and he had trailed down to the villain who held her a prisoner.

"How dare you say you were true and faithful to me?"

"You know I was, and I am. Did I not leave you in possession of all your property? Did I take one penny from you?"

"How dare you say you left my property with me?"

"How can you claim I did not. You have it all in your possession, every penny. I was seeking to find your friends. It appears you have found them, and I am glad; but I do not understand how it is you accuse me; I who saved you, saved your life and your fortune."

A certain suspicion ran through Dick's mind, and he determined to raise the curtain on another act of the remarkable and startling drama. So he worked a change, one of his wonderful and magical changes. Mrs. Belden vanished as though she had dissolved, and Dick Velsor, the detective stood before the amazed and paralyzed Mr. Brown.

"Well, sir," said Dick, "what have you to say now?"

The man for an interval could say nothing. He merely gazed with startled eyes.

"What magic is this?" Brown exclaimed. "Who are you?"

"He is a detective officer. He has your pedigree. He has been on your track for some time. He has run you down in your whole scheme. It is now his chance for closing in on you."

"And who are you?"

"I am not the lady whom you befriended."

"You are not."

"But if your story is true, I am under deep obligations to you."

"How?"

"Mrs. Belden is my mother."

When Brown spoke he proved himself to be a man of ready resource. He arose, advanced toward our hero, and said:

"I am glad to meet you. Yes, I am the happiest man in New York. I can do more for your mother than I had hoped. I can bring to her presence her own son; but I will say I did not know she had a son."

Our hero knew that he had won; but he did not know just how to act. He did not take Brown's hand, but said:

"I can not take your hand until I know you have told me the truth."

"I can prove I have told you the truth. Your own mother will vindicate me."

The man spoke in a very confident tone, and our hero did not know just what to think.

"Where is my mother?" he asked.

"I will go and prepare your mother to receive you."

"So be it; but I can not lose sight of you. You can not carry out any new scheme now."

"I have no desire to carry out any scheme."

"Where is my mother?"

"She is in New York."

"Why did you say you last saw her in Chicago?"

"I did not."

"Who are her enemies?"

"The rascals French and Nesbitt, against whom I protected her."

Dick was a quick analyzer of incidents, and certain very reasonable solutions of the whole matter arose in his mind. He recalled the words of Brown while talking to the two men in the beer saloon. He recalled the man's independence and defiance, and he believed that he had got on to the real position of the affair, and his solution did not exonerate the man Brown from being a villain, it only showed the man's wonderful cunning. He had been a skillful general. He had left open a road for a successful retreat.

"Will you take me into the presence of my mother?"

"I will when I see your mother and prepare her. I have a very tender regard for your mother. She is in poor health. She must not receive any sudden shock."

"Who are you, sir?"

"In good time you will learn who I am, and you will regret all the bitter words you have spoken to me."

"Let my friend here go with you."

"No one must go with me. I am determined to guard her against any sudden shock, even at the risk of incurring your enmity."

At this moment Bragg shot forth a very happy suggestion:

"I believe the lady is in this house."

Brown's face became ashen, and his agitation confirmed the suggestion.

"She is not in this house!" he cried in a hasty voice.

"You have deceived me before."

Our hero was satisfied that his mother was in the house. The man's agitation told the tale. Dick did not wish to rush into his mother's presence. He knew that she did not know of his existence. He believed it possible that she was in delicate health. But he did not mean to lose sight of the man Brown, or permit him to work any new scheme.

"She is not in this house; but she is not far off," said Brown.

"She is in this house," declared Bragg; and he added: "You keep this man here, Dick, and I will find the lady."

"No, no!" cried Brown.

"I will not let you concoct a new scheme."

"I do not wish to concoct a new scheme. I wish to save your mother's life. I do not wish to permit you to kill her."

Again there followed a silence. Our hero was thinking. Finally he decided upon his course, and he said, addressing Bragg:

"I will keep this man here. You go and look for my mother."

"HOLD!" cried Brown; "you are doing wrong."

"I can not trust you," said Dick.

"You must trust me."

"Go on," said Dick, addressing Bragg.

"Let me persuade you. I admit Mrs. Belden is in this house. Let me go to her presence. This man can watch me, and see that I do not attempt to escape. There is no reason why I should escape. I have nothing to fear."

Bragg looked at Dick for instructions. A plan was suggested to our hero's mind, and he said:

"I have a friend outside. I will send him in and let him decide the matter. Bragg, keep that man here until my friend appears."

Dick exchanged winks with Bragg, who fell to the scheme. Once in the hall, Dick worked one of his magical changes. It proved to be a total eclipse of his own identity outwardly. Then he returned to the room. Brown glanced at him, and said:

"It is wonderful! I never would have recognized you, had I not known what to suspect. Your identity is lost, and it is well."

"Now we can arrange our plan," said Dick. "You shall have a few moments' talk with my mother, and then you shall introduce me. I will in my own way make my identity known."

"And I shall first speak with your mother alone."

"Yes. And now mark my words: I know all about you; your whole scheme I know; just how cunning and deep you have been, and if in any way you seek to anticipate my disclosure of myself, it will be bad for you. On the contrary, if you leave all to me, and act now like a man, it will be much better for you."

"You can depend upon me."

"I place no dependence upon you. I simply warn you, that's all. I tell you again I am on to your whole scheme. I know how far you've gone. I know what your purpose was, and you are acting now in your own behalf when you keep faith with me."

"I will go to the rooms where your mother may await you, and prepare her to receive a stranger who desires a long talk, that's all."

"I understand."

Our hero more fully explained his plan, and then permitted the man to leave the room. Dick followed. At the head of the first stair-way they were met by a lady, who looked in a wondering manner, and Brown said:

"It is a gentleman who must see Mrs. Belden."

They ascended to the third floor, and then our hero said, as he pulled out his watch:

"I give you just ten minutes, not a second longer, remember."

Brown knocked at the door of the rear room, and a secret voice said:

"Come in."

Dick heard that voice and his heart beat fast. Sensations such as he had never experienced in all his life before agitated him. Brown entered the room, and Dick waited, watch in hand. At the expiration of nine minutes, Brown came from the room. He approached Dick, and said:

"All is ready. Come!"

Dick trembled like a weak woman as the man led him into the room. A lady sat at a table. She was a lovely faced woman, and our hero knew at a glance that he was gazing upon the face of his mother, and his heart seemed as though it would rise in his throat and smother him. Brown said, as our hero entered the room:

"Madame, here is a gentleman who desires to see you on very important business."

Brown left the room, and found Bragg awaiting him, who said:

"We will wait for further orders, sir."

The two descended to the parlor floor. In the meantime, a very thrilling and startling interview was being held in the upper room.

"Will you be seated, sir?" said the lady.

Dick's gaze was riveted on the lady's face. He felt like rushing forward, grasping her in his arms, and exclaiming:

"I am your son!"

"I understand," said the lady, "you wish to speak to me on important business. Will you state your business, sir?"

"I will open by making a startling proposition. You had a son, madame?"

The lady gave a start. Her face became deathly pale; but in a low tone she ejaculated:

"I knew it."

"Where is that son?"

"I have not seen him since he was two years old."

There followed a painful silence. Both were laboring under suppressed excitement. Dick at length managed to say:

"Have you heard from that child since he was stolen from you?"

"I have," came the answer.

"Then you have reason to believe that your child still lives?"

"I have reason to hope that he lives," came the answer.

"Then you are prepared to learn that your son lives?"

"I am," came the answer in a trembling voice.

Dick had stood ready to leap to his mother's assistance should her agitation overcome her; but she was singularly calm.

"Madame, you shall see your son."

"When?" The woman's calmness was extraordinary.

"There are some matters we must first discuss. What are your relations to the man who introduced me to you?"

"He first told me there was a hope for me to meet my son."

There came a fierce light in our hero's eyes as he said:

"When did he do this?"

"Immediately after he rescued me from the two wicked men who were seeking to abduct me."

Dick stared; but in a second he got on to the whole scheme, and he said:

"Not since then?"

"No. He has been looking for my son, however, and your presence here would indicate that he had succeeded."

These words showed the deep game that Brown had been playing.

"Madame, your son is found; but before I can bring you face to face with him, tell me about your first meeting with Brown."

"Who is Brown?"

"The man who brought me into this room."

"His name is Henry Paradis."

"Tell me under what circumstances you met him."

"I started from San Francisco for New York. I arrived in Chicago, and remained overnight. I was in the hotel when a man came up to me. He seemed to be struck with something in my appearance. He approached me, and asked me if my name was not—" The lady stopped short.

"Proceed," said Dick.

"He mentioned my real name—the name of my son."

"And that name is Velsor?"

"No; my real name is Francis. He told me he had known my husband. He asked me about my son. I told him a part of my story, and he told me my son lived; but I had previously had reason to believe that such was the fact. The man was to meet me again. He did not come, and I took a late train for New York. At a certain station I left the train for a moment to walk on the platform. It was night. A woman engaged me in conversation. I forgot about the train, which was about to start. I made a rush to get on board, when I was seized by two men. People about the station dared not interfere, as the men who seized me said I was an escaped lunatic. I was led away by the two men, when suddenly a third man appeared. He presented a pistol at the two men and compelled them to release me. The man who rescued me was Paradis. He said his being on the train was accidental. He accompanied me to New York, secured all my baggage, and brought me to this house, where I have remained while he was searching for my son."

"But you were to meet a fugitive here?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not communicate with her?"

"She is not in New York. If she had only waited until I arrived here, all would have been right."

"What did this man Paradis tell you during the few moments previous to his introduction of me?"

"He told me that charges of the vilest character had been made against him, and that I must maintain his integrity against all charges."

"And can you do so?"

"I can. His treatment of me has been kind, and his services to me are great."

"Madame, are you prepared to meet your son?"

"I am. But is his identity fully established?"

"You can yourself judge of the proofs of his identity."

Quick as a flash Dick threw aside his disguise. He had prepared for a full revelation of himself. It was one of his magical changes. He stood before his mother in all his wonderful resemblance to her. The woman gazed, started to rise to her feet, but fell back helpless in her chair; but she gazed with starting eyeballs. Dick approached, threw his arms around her neck, and kissing her, said:

"My mother!"

There followed a scene which we will not attempt to describe; but half an hour later, Dick said:

"Now, mother, tell me your story."

The woman proceeded, and unfolded the following strange narrative:

"Your father was a very handsome man. He had a cousin who had been my schoolmate. She had Indian blood in her veins. She was an impetuous and beautiful woman, and she was rich in her own right. She fell madly in love with your father, but he had met and loved me. This woman became furious; indeed, I may say she went mad; but, after a time, she appeared to become resigned. But on the night when I was married, she whispered terrible threats in my ear. I did not repeat her threats to my husband, and there I was wrong. Had I done so, much misery might have been averted; but I did not think she would go so far in her scheme of vengeance. For two years my life was a happy one; and then one night the hotel in which I lived was burned down. It was a night of horror. My husband rescued me and our child. He put us in a place of safety. We were put in a carriage. From the moment I entered that carriage, I lost consciousness. I have never seen husband or child since that night until now."

Dick had listened with the most rapt attention, and after an interval, asked:

"Did you not associate your husband's baffled cousin with the abduction?"

"We did at first; but it seemed so terrible. She, however, proved her innocence. But after all, she was at the bottom of the whole wickedness."

"Where is she?"

"She is dead. She afterward married a very cruel and wicked man. He wasted her whole fortune and was killed in a duel somewhere in Texas. She died in misery; but before her death she sent for me and made a full confession. She said she had engaged her husband—this was before her marriage—to carry out her scheme. She never knew what had become of my husband; but the chances were my child lived. She had a relative to whom she confided the child. She had told him to take the child to Europe and adopt him to some family, and she provided an ample fortune for the child."

Then Dick told his tale. How he had been placed in charge of the old Frenchman, and how a moderate fortune had come to him. Said Dick:

"How is it she was unable to tell you where I was?"

"Her relative who had placed you was drowned from a steamer on his way back to America. He had not written any particulars, and she never knew what disposal had been made of the child."

"Well, mother, we are together once again."

"Yes, my child; and it is a marvelous series of incidents."

"It is. But where is my father?"

"I believe he was murdered. It was given out that he perished in the fire. A body was found. While it was identified as his body, I always doubted the story, and so did my father."

"And she married the man who caused all the trouble, and they are both dead?"

"Yes."

"And yet, mother, I believe my father lives, and Paradis knows his whereabouts. How about the robbery and attempted murder of your father?"

"My husband's cousin, the wicked woman who wrought so much misery for me, left a daughter. This daughter bore a wonderful resemblance to her mother, and this woman told me a terrible story, that this daughter was born before her marriage, and that—"

"You need say no more, my mother; but I believe her statement a lie. I believe she only told of my existence in order to heighten your agony. I do not believe she had a daughter."

"She had a daughter. This daughter once came to me. I recognized her by her wonderful resemblance to her mother. The night after she saw me the robbery took place. I thought she was the thief. I feared a terrible scandal, and Louise Webster came to the rescue, simply because certain singular incidents pointed to her as the guilty one; but she always had the proofs of her innocence. But I suppose you knew the robbery mystery has been solved."

"I did not know it."

"It is true; and the guilty parties are under arrest. The robbery was by a gang of men. The innocence of the poor girl I suspected has been positively established."

"Mother," Dick said, "I will take you to Louise Webster, and then I will have a talk with this man Paradis, and I doubt not a still more wonderful revelation is to come."

Dick saw Brown, as he called him, and said:

"My mother will go with me. I will see you later on." Our hero added in a decided tone: "You have nothing to fear, you can meet her."

"I will," came the answer, "and I have a revelation to make, one even greater than has transpired."

A carriage was summoned, and Dick and his mother were driven to the home of the aunt of Louise Webster, and for many hours after the whole party were engaged in making most startling explanations.

Later, Dick met Brown, or Paradis, and Brown explained that he had been the lawyer of the husband of the woman who had instigated all the mischief. The man had revealed that Henry Francis was not dead but an inmate of an insane asylum. After the woman's death, Brown had charge of the patient. The man declared it was not until a year ago that he learned the real identity of Francis. He said further that it was only a few months previous that he learned the true identity of the lady who had been known as Mrs. Belden. He further said that he had intended in his own way to bring father and mother and son together.

We will here state that Dick was led to believe that this part of the lawyer's statement was partly true, but that he also intended in some way to feather his own nest out of the affair.

In answer to Dick's inquiry as to the identity of the lady at whose house he had met him, the lawyer explained that she was the daughter of a client, and that she was temporarily under his charge.

"And where is my father?" asked Dick.

"He escaped from the asylum a few weeks ago, so I have just learned. He is a dangerous maniac, I fear, running abroad."

The man's story brought to our hero's mind the eccentric gentleman whom he had met the previous night, and he determined to start an immediate search for him.

Dick saw Bragg and Benson. Long explanations followed between the three officers. Bragg said:

"I can lead you to the man whom you think is your father."

"How is that?"

"After you left the house where you found your mother, I came forth, and soon found I was being followed. I doubled on my dodger and dodged him. Come and I will show you where he can be found."

The party proceeded to an obscure hotel. They found their man. Dick entered his presence alone, and again a series of most startling and thrilling explanations followed, resulting in our hero's father following him to the house where Mrs. Francis had at last found rest and real friends.

Dick saw his mother, and having previously prepared her, she was not so greatly agitated when he said:

"Mother, your husband and my father lives, and is found."

And now, dear reader, we introduce them to you once again after the lapse of one year. Brown's story had been accepted, although Dick always knew how guilty the man really was; but he never revealed the real facts to his parents.

Dick's father forever settled the infamous story concerning the daughter of the woman who had worked all the mischief. The date of her birth was settled beyond all question. She was five years the junior of our hero, whose sister she had become by adoption.

Two years following the reuniting of the family which had been so strangely separated and so miraculously reunited, Miss Louise Webster became Mrs. Dick Francis, the wife of the great Western detective; for Dick became a professional.

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